



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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

**Volume 73**

(12 March 2012 to 15 April 2012)

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# Assembly Members

Agnew, Steven (North Down)  
Allister, Jim (North Antrim)  
Anderson, Ms Martina (Foyle)  
Anderson, Sydney (Upper Bann)  
Attwood, Alex (West Belfast)  
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)  
Bell, Jonathan (Strangford)  
Boylan, Cathal (Newry and Armagh)  
Boyle, Ms Michaela (West Tyrone)  
Bradley, Dominic (Newry and Armagh)  
Bradley, Ms Paula (North Belfast)  
Brady, Mickey (Newry and Armagh)  
Buchanan, Thomas (West Tyrone)  
Byrne, Joe (West Tyrone)  
Campbell, Gregory (East Londonderry)  
Clarke, Trevor (South Antrim)  
Clarke, Willie (South Down) (*Resigned 12 April 2012*)  
Cochrane, Mrs Judith (East Belfast)  
Copeland, Michael (East Belfast)  
Craig, Jonathan (Lagan Valley)  
Cree, Leslie (North Down)  
Dallat, John (East Londonderry)  
Dickson, Stewart (East Antrim)  
Dobson, Mrs Jo-Anne (Upper Bann)  
Doherty, Pat (West Tyrone)  
Douglas, Sammy (East Belfast)  
Dunne, Gordon (North Down)  
Durkan, Mark H (Foyle)  
Easton, Alex (North Down)  
Eastwood, Colum (Foyle)  
Elliott, Tom (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Farry, Dr Stephen (North Down)  
Flanagan, Phil (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Ford, David (South Antrim)  
Foster, Mrs Arlene (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Frew, Paul (North Antrim)  
Gardiner, Samuel (Upper Bann)  
Gildernew, Ms Michelle (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Girvan, Paul (South Antrim)  
Givan, Paul (Lagan Valley)  
Hale, Mrs Brenda (Lagan Valley)  
Hamilton, Simon (Strangford)  
Hazzard, Christopher (South Down) (*From 13 April 2012*)  
Hay, William (Speaker)  
Hilditch, David (East Antrim)  
Humphrey, William (North Belfast)  
Hussey, Ross (West Tyrone)  
Irwin, William (Newry and Armagh)  
Kelly, Mrs Dolores (Upper Bann)  
Kelly, Gerry (North Belfast)  
Kennedy, Danny (Newry and Armagh)  
Kinahan, Danny (South Antrim)  
Lewis, Ms Pam (South Antrim)  
Lo, Ms Anna (South Belfast)  
Lunn, Trevor (Lagan Valley)  
Lynch, Seán (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Lyttle, Chris (East Belfast)  
McCallister, John (South Down)  
McCann, Fra (West Belfast)  
McCann, Ms Jennifer (West Belfast)  
McCarthy, Kieran (Strangford)  
McCartney, Raymond (Foyle)  
McCausland, Nelson (North Belfast)  
McClarty, David (East Londonderry)  
McCrea, Basil (Lagan Valley)  
McCrea, Ian (Mid Ulster)  
McDevitt, Conall (South Belfast)  
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair (South Belfast)  
McElduff, Barry (West Tyrone)  
McGimpsey, Michael (South Belfast)  
McGlone, Patsy (Mid Ulster)  
McGuinness, Martin (Mid Ulster)  
McIlveen, David (North Antrim)  
McIlveen, Miss Michelle (Strangford)  
McKay, Daithí (North Antrim)  
McKevitt, Mrs Karen (South Down)  
McLaughlin, Mitchel (South Antrim)  
McMullan, Oliver (East Antrim)  
McNarry, David (Strangford)  
McQuillan, Adrian (East Londonderry)  
Maginness, Alban (North Belfast)  
Maskey, Alex (South Belfast)  
Maskey, Paul (West Belfast)  
Molloy, Francie (Mid Ulster)  
Morrow, The Lord (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)  
Moutray, Stephen (Upper Bann)  
Murphy, Conor (Newry and Armagh)  
Nesbitt, Mike (Strangford)  
Newton, Robin (East Belfast)  
Ní Chuilín, Ms Carál (North Belfast)  
Ó hOisín, Cathal (East Londonderry)  
O'Dowd, John (Upper Bann)  
O'Neill, Mrs Michelle (Mid Ulster)  
Overend, Mrs Sandra (Mid Ulster)  
Poots, Edwin (Lagan Valley)  
Ramsey, Pat (Foyle)  
Ramsey, Ms Sue (West Belfast)  
Ritchie, Ms Margaret (South Down) (*Resigned 31 March 2012*)  
Robinson, George (East Londonderry)  
Robinson, Peter (East Belfast)  
Rogers, Sean (South Down) (*From 2 April 2012*)  
Ross, Alastair (East Antrim)  
Ruane, Ms Caitriona (South Down)  
Sheehan, Pat (West Belfast)  
Spratt, Jimmy (South Belfast)  
Storey, Mervyn (North Antrim)  
Swann, Robin (North Antrim)  
Weir, Peter (North Down)  
Wells, Jim (South Down)  
Wilson, Sammy (East Antrim)

# Principal Officers and Officials of the Assembly

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Speaker.....                                    | Mr William Hay MLA                     |
| Principal Deputy Speaker .....                  | Mr Francie Molloy MLA                  |
| Deputy Speakers.....                            | Mr Roy Beggs MLA<br>Mr John Dallat MLA |
| Clerk to the Assembly/Director-General.....     | Mr Trevor Reaney                       |
| Director of Clerking and Reporting .....        | Mr John Stewart                        |
| Director of Corporate Services.....             | Mr Richard Stewart                     |
| Director of Facilities/Keeper of the House..... | Mr Stephen Welch                       |
| Director of Information and Outreach .....      | Dr Gareth McGrath                      |
| Director of Legal and Governance Services.....  | Mr Hugh Widdis                         |
| Examiner of Statutory Rules .....               | Mr Gordon Nabney                       |
| Adviser to the Speaker.....                     | Mr Robin Ramsey                        |
| Clerk Assistants.....                           | Ms Nuala Dunwoody<br>Mr Damien Martin  |
| Editor of Debates .....                         | Mr Simon Burrowes                      |
| Clerk to the Assembly Commission.....           | Mr Tony Logue                          |



# Ministerial Offices

## The Executive Committee

|  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| First Minister .....                                       | Mr Peter Robinson    |
| Deputy First Minister .....                                | Mr Martin McGuinness |
| Minister for Employment and Learning .....                 | Dr Stephen Farry     |
| Minister for Regional Development .....                    | Mr Danny Kennedy     |
| Minister for Social Development .....                      | Mr Nelson McCausland |
| Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.....         | Mrs Michelle O'Neill |
| Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.....                 | Ms Carál Ní Chuilín  |
| Minister of Education.....                                 | Mr John O'Dowd       |
| Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment .....         | Mrs Arlene Foster    |
| Minister of the Environment .....                          | Mr Alex Attwood      |
| Minister of Finance and Personnel.....                     | Mr Sammy Wilson      |
| Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety..... | Mr Edwin Poots       |
| Minister of Justice .....                                  | Mr David Ford        |

## Junior Ministers

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



# Official Report (Hansard)



# Assembly Sitings



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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 12 March 2012

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Executive Committee Business

### Suspension of Standing Orders

**Mr P Robinson (The First Minister):** I beg to move

*That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 12 March 2012.*

**Mr Speaker:** Before I put the Question, I remind Members that this motion requires cross-community support.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved (with cross-community support):*

*That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 12 March 2012.*

**Mr Speaker:** As there are Ayes from all sides of the House and no dissenting voices, I am satisfied that cross-community support has been demonstrated. Today's sitting may go beyond 7.00 pm, if required.

### Programme for Government

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to five hours for the debate. The First Minister and deputy First Minister will have up to one hour to divide at their discretion between moving and winding on the motion. All other Members who wish to speak will have 10 minutes.

**Mr P Robinson (The First Minister):** I beg to move

*That this Assembly endorses the Programme for Government 2011-15 agreed by the Executive.*

On 17 November 2011, the Northern Ireland Executive launched the draft Programme for Government for consultation. At that time, I said that this blueprint reflected our intention to take responsibility for our future, our intention to modernise and reform and our intention to move forward as one community. I reaffirm those intentions today. Today, we seek the endorsement of the Northern Ireland Assembly for our proposals and for the Programme for Government. It is the responsibility of those elected to office in Northern Ireland to lead, but it is also our responsibility to listen. Having listened to the people of Northern Ireland through the consultation process, we have improved and added focus to the initial document. Today, we are determined to finalise and pass this Programme for Government, but, even more importantly, tomorrow and in the days that follow, we will deliver it.

This is an exceptionally important time in Northern Ireland's history. We have put the conflict of previous decades behind us. Now, we must focus on tackling the everyday problems that each society throughout the world has to face. We have a genuine decision to make: we can either continue to contain and manage our problems, or we can seek to resolve them and, in doing so, decide to take our place on the world stage. For our part, that decision has already been made, and delivery has begun.

This year will be our time. To demonstrate that, we have a stunning series of events planned that will attract people from every corner of the globe: the opening of the new Titanic visitor centre in Belfast; the opening of the Giant's Causeway visitor centre; the centenary of the Titanic's maiden voyage; the opening of the MAC, Belfast's new arts centre; the Olympic and Paralympic Games 2012 torch relay; the arrival of the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race to Londonderry; the fiftieth Belfast Festival at Queen's; the Irish Open at Royal Portrush; and, to add flavour to the year, we start a decade of significant centenaries reflecting our historic shared differences.

We are not a people given to hype or hyperbole. Our scepticism is a healthy characteristic. However, let me be absolutely clear: these will be events of genuinely international interest built on a globally important heritage — events that will look forward as well as back. This is our opportunity to showcase everything that is good about Northern Ireland and all the potential that lies ahead of us. In particular, the events represent incredibly important opportunities to highlight the talents of our people. We have absolutely no reason to feel inferior when it comes to our capabilities. Northern Ireland people are second to none. The incredible success of our movie stars such as Liam Neeson, Kenneth Branagh, Stephen Rea or Ciarán Hinds reflects the professionalism and hard work of those individuals, as well as the humour, culture and shared heritage of the community that nurtured them.

The question is how we build on the deep reservoir of talent that exists here. The challenge must be to create a society that can bring people together to push in the same direction for the common good. There is no reason why that cannot happen, and the Programme for Government sets out a route map to achieve that.

People from here have already had a large impact across the world. For example, people of local stock helped to build modern America. Look at that long list of US presidents whose lineage is traced back to Northern Ireland. Think about international sports stars such as Graeme McDowell, Rory McIlroy and Darren Clarke, who, today, compete with the best in the world and, time after time, win. For centuries, people from here have gone elsewhere to make their mark. The challenge before us is to create the opportunities that will encourage our citizens to root themselves right here.

For every superstar, there are many tens of thousands of unsung heroes contributing huge value through business, working in our hospitals or schools or supporting the most vulnerable in their communities. It is those so-called ordinary people who will transform our society. That is why it was so important to listen to the opinions coming from Northern Ireland's grass roots while we finalised our Programme for Government. Following the November launch, we undertook an extensive programme of engagement with the public and key stakeholders. During that period, we issued around 1,000 documents, received more than 430 responses and held or supported 20 events. We took heed of what we heard, and we are confident that the finalised Programme for Government presents a real and viable business plan to move us forward, grow our economy and achieve the social changes that are necessary to ensure that our community — a single, unified community — moves from strength to strength. For example, the final version of the programme draws out the top priorities identified during the consultation, namely the promotion of over 25,000 new jobs; £1 billion of investment in the Northern Ireland economy; increased visitor numbers and tourist revenue; supporting young people into employment by providing skills and training; and reforming and modernising the delivery of health and social care.

Before I talk about the outcome of the consultation in more detail, I would like colleagues to take a step back for a moment and think about what this programme means for our people. In simple terms, people want delivery. They want delivery on the ground that they can see, feel and understand; they want good jobs; they want to live in safe,

peaceful and clean communities; and they want to know that they will receive effective services when they need them. Put simply, people in Northern Ireland want exactly the same things as everyone the world over hopes for — a good quality of life for themselves, their family and their community. The Programme for Government is, therefore, vital. It is a statement of genuine intent that sets out a road map for reform that will lead us to the future that our citizens desire and deserve.

The draft programme had a strong emphasis on the economy, and we will return to that theme tomorrow, when we hold our debate on the economic strategy. As it stands, the final version of the Programme for Government retains a similar emphasis, and I make no apology for that. People need to have the chance to contribute through work. We need opportunities that can motivate everyone and enable them to create the value that they, their families and their communities need. It is good for their health and well-being, good for their community and good for the economy as a whole.

A commitment to promote 25,000 new jobs, therefore, remains at the top of the agenda, along with commitments to support young people into employment by providing skills and training; to support £300 million of investment by businesses in R&D, with at least 20% coming from small and medium-sized enterprises; to press for the devolution of corporation tax and reduce its level; to include social clauses in all our public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction; to aid the liquidity of small and medium-sized enterprises through a £50 million loan fund; to deliver at least 30 schemes to improve landscapes and public areas and promote private sector investment in towns and cities; to ensure that 90% of large-scale investment planning decisions are made within six months and applications with job creation potential are given additional weight; to introduce an extension of the small business rate relief scheme to 2015; and to eliminate air passenger duty on direct long-haul flights. However, we have gone further. The final Programme for Government includes enhanced commitments on the economy, including commitments to achieve a £375 million injection through foreign direct investment, which is an increase from £300 million in the draft programme, as part of a £1 billion investment package, and to facilitate the delivery of the Executive's 20% target for increased drawdown of competitive EU funds. That is a new commitment. The final Programme for Government also includes commitments to increase the value of manufacturing exports by 20%, which is an increase from the 15% commitment in the draft programme; to raise visitor numbers to 4.2 million, which is an increase from 3.6 million in the draft programme; and to increase tourist revenue to £676 million by 2013, which is an increase from the £625 million committed in the draft programme.

The message is that we have listened to what we have been told. It is clear that a strong economy is needed to drive social change. People need to be empowered to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. Delivery will also require investment. We will return to that in more detail in coming weeks in the debate on the investment strategy, which was the third document we launched for public consultation back in November. All of this will require a huge, concerted effort by everyone. Our economy will grow only by developing people and empowering them to deliver the necessary growth. We need to foster business entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs and capable employees



who can work with international companies. However, creating that level of opportunity will be difficult when 28% of children are in a low-income household. Economic measures will not be able to deliver all the change that is needed. Thriving economies help to create healthy communities, but healthy and peaceful communities are also a very important precursor to a strong economy.

### 12.15 pm

We are determined to work together across government to make a real impact on the divisions that have blighted our community. That is why we have developed the Delivering Social Change delivery framework. The reality is that we cannot continue to address the so-called intractable problems of poverty and social inclusion using the methods employed in the past. We have too many strategies, too many policies and too many action plans, many of which refer to work already proposed or under way and do not add real value. The difference with this new approach is that we are not interested in producing vast and unwieldy documents for their own sake. We want to pursue a smaller number of additional objectives; for example, flagship projects to support early interventions where children are at risk of harm. The key will be to introduce a systematic roll-out of programmes that can make a difference across all areas. The development of Delivering Social Change demonstrates the value of listening. People told us that they expect to see Departments working together effectively and transparently to make a difference.

We paid attention to concerns that the needs of key groups, such as victims and survivors, were not fully reflected in the draft. We decided that a new approach would be required that would enable us to focus the £80 million social investment fund, the £12 million childcare fund and the other available resources on the actions that can impact most effectively in the long term. We will look carefully at what that means for existing commitments to produce action plans. In future, our primary focus will be on actions, not plans.

This systematic, outcome-focused approach will also apply to the other pledges in the Programme for Government. Although we need to focus on the economy, the Programme for Government is full of commitments that are essential if we are to achieve the necessary transformation in quality of life for our citizens. Important examples include promises to introduce and support initiatives aimed at reducing fuel poverty across Northern Ireland, including preventative interventions, improved thermal efficiency of Housing Executive stock and ensuring full double glazing in its properties. Other examples include the establishment of an advisory group to assist Ministers in alleviating hardship, including any implications arising from the UK Government's welfare reform programme, and the development of the One Plan for the regeneration of Londonderry, incorporating the key sites at Fort George and Ebrington. I am particularly pleased to see a new pledge to improve patient and client outcomes and access to new treatments and services and the expansion of the existing commitment on educational achievement at GCSE to include improvements not only for young people from a disadvantaged background but for the wider population, given the need to restore our international position and address underachievement.

I have already made my views clear about the desirability of bringing our community together through education. I am

particularly pleased to say that three critical commitments remain in the finalised programme: first, to establish a ministerial advisory group that will explore and bring forward recommendations to the Minister of Education for the advancement of shared education; secondly, to ensure that all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015; and, thirdly, to increase substantially the number of schools that share facilities by that same year. These are real commitments, and, together with a new pledge to actively seek local agreement to reduce the number of peace walls, alongside the development of our CSI strategy, I fully expect to see this society coming together in new ways to deliver the shared future that we all want. I believe that this demonstrates fully that the Executive have listened to their consultees and that the Programme for Government has been improved as a result.

We recognise that the draft programme is significantly shorter than its predecessor, containing as it does 76 commitments, compared to almost 400 previously. Some of those consulted felt that 76 commitments were still too many, while others highlighted the desire to address key gaps, including the aspiration to place greater emphasis on the needs of children, older people and those with disabilities.

What has come across very strongly from this exercise is that, although people are generally supportive of the programme, they are much more focused on delivery. They want us to listen, but they want to see results. They want tangible transformation, not endless analysis. In that context, I thank the Committee for its work on the programme. I am very grateful to it and the Chairman for the work that underpins the Committee's conclusions. We will seek to fill all the gaps that were identified through that engagement, either through the amendments to the programme that we have already made or as we move forward with implementation.

I am also happy to confirm that we will put in place arrangements to ensure that rigorous delivery plans are in place to meet our commitments. Those will be the subject of progress reports, which will be published annually, together with mid-year performance updates. The last time I addressed the Assembly on the draft Programme for Government, I said that we were on a new journey in a new era of devolved government. For the first time in a generation, we have completed a full Assembly term and have begun the job of building a better future. By the time of the next Assembly election, we will be judged by the electorate on our delivery. I believe that, through this Programme for Government, we can and will deliver a better, brighter and more prosperous Northern Ireland. I am determined that that delivery should be visible straight away. Indeed, we have been delivering impressively and at a significantly greater pace, especially since the Assembly election. This debate is a vital step in the process. Members will be aware of the issues that our citizens experience on the ground. They see and feel at first hand the impact of the economic downturn and the tightening of public resources. Members will, no doubt, have views about the commitments that are set out, and many may not always agree on those priorities. Therefore, it is important that Members use this opportunity to inform the process. However, when the debate concludes, let us be in no doubt that this programme must be implemented.

I look forward to seeing the Executive's commitments delivered, and I look forward to working with all Assembly Members who want Northern Ireland to move forward to make that happen. I commend the motion, and I commend the Programme for Government to the House.

**Mr Elliott (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** I thank the First Minister and the deputy First Minister for bringing this forward and for briefing me this morning on the aspects of the Programme for Government. I speak on behalf of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Members will be aware that the Committee took the lead in co-ordinating the responses of Statutory Committees to the Programme for Government and sought their views on it, with particular focus on three specific areas: gaps in the Programme for Government; comments on the milestones and outcomes of the departmental commitments; and monitoring progress. I am sure that the Chairpersons and members of other Committees will give their views.

The Committee was briefed by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister on the draft Programme for Government on 14 December last year. The Committee also held round-table discussions to seek the views of the commissions that fall within OFMDFM's remit: the Equality Commission; the Commissioner for Children and Young People; the Commissioner for Older People; and the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors.

Members will be aware that the Committee has not had an opportunity to consider or comment on the final version of the Programme for Government that we are debating today or the changes from the draft. However, the Committee welcomed the five strategic priorities in the draft Programme for Government, which are now in the final version.

I shall begin by considering gaps in the Programme for Government, some of which have been addressed. The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister wanted to see greater reference to Europe in the Programme for Government, and the addition of the Executive's European priorities in the final Programme for Government's building blocks for priorities 1, 2 and 3 is welcome. The Committee also welcomes the inclusion in priority 1 of the final Programme for Government of an additional specific commitment on the Executive's 20% target for increased drawdown of competitive European Union funding that it had asked OFMDFM to consider.

The Committee commented on the cross-cutting nature of the priorities and wished to see more detail on how Departments' progress will be monitored to allow for effective scrutiny, particularly in areas such as poverty and social exclusion, and the integrated childcare strategy. I note that the final Programme for Government includes more detail in priority 2 about structures to co-ordinate Departments working together to tackle poverty and social exclusion, namely the Delivering Social Change framework. The Committee considered correspondence about the DSC framework from the First Minister and deputy First Minister at its meeting last week and agreed to request an oral briefing on it. We look forward to learning more about how it will deliver effective, cross-departmental working.

The Committee asked that consideration be given to including Northern Ireland-specific targets in the Programme for Government in addition to the UK-wide targets in the Child Poverty Act 2010. That would allow for monitoring of progress on child poverty locally and contribute towards achieving the UK-wide targets. We do not feel that has been significantly addressed in the Programme for Government document because we believe that the UK targets could be met without any improvement in the Northern Ireland targets. That is why it is important that we see localised Northern Ireland targets.

The Committee's report also highlighted the need for detailed delivery plans. The Committee was briefed by officials on the 2008-2011 Programme for Government delivery report at its meeting last week. We learned that Committees will have an opportunity to comment on the draft delivery plans of their respective Departments, and OFMDFM plans to bring that forward to monitor progress and delivery of the Programme for Government.

The Commission for Victims and Survivors felt that there was insufficient reference to dealing with the past, a problem that has continued to plague society in Northern Ireland and, it appears, will continue to do so. The commissioners also felt that a commitment in the Programme for Government to continue to develop services that address the needs of victims and their families would have afforded recognition to victims.

The Commissioner for Older People felt that the draft PFG did not sufficiently address the significance of an ageing population, including its significance for Northern Ireland's workforce and as a key consumer of health and social services. The commissioner also felt that increasing pensioner poverty, including fuel poverty, should have been referenced in the Programme for Government.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People believed that there were significant gaps in the draft Programme for Government in a number of areas, including early intervention, family support, mental health, play and leisure participation, safeguarding children, post-primary transfer, special educational needs, children in care and children with disabilities.

The commissioners gave a broad welcome to the proposal to legislate to extend age discrimination to the provision of goods and services. The Equality Commission and a number of Committee members highlighted the need for legislation on race and disability to be brought up to date with developments in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Committee asked OFMDFM to consider bringing forward a flexible framework capable of reflecting change and best practice in relation to disability and race. I am sure that the Committee will wish to return to that issue when we have more detail on the measures to promote the rights of people from an ethnic minority background, which has been inserted in priority 2 of the final Programme for Government.

On legislation generally, I note that the concluding sentence of annex 1 of the PFG now states:

*"It is intended that this Programme for Government will be supported by a legislative programme that complements its delivery objectives."*

The Committee's report stated that it would like to see a commitment to the publication of a rolling legislative programme and more information on legislation that has

been agreed. This is an issue that the Committee will return to, and I raised it with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister just this morning. I understand that they may have some suggestions on how to improve that.

The Committee heard evidence relating to unclaimed benefits, particularly for older people, and it would welcome a mechanism whereby an individual's inquiry about a particular benefit entitlement would be the trigger for the provision of advice and a check on his or her other benefit entitlements.

The Committee wishes to see the issue of peace walls considered in consultation with the affected local communities from the outset. No doubt, the Chairperson of the Justice Committee will want to comment further on what is in the final version of the PFG.

The Committee has reservations about the red/amber/green system of recording progress. The Committee for Finance and Personnel provided us with a PEDU briefing on the monitoring arrangements for PFG at our meeting on 7 March, and we will consider that again this week.

The Committee is keen that the system of monitoring departmental progress reflects what is happening on the ground, with regular reporting to Committees.

### 12.30 pm

I will now reference some issues that the Ulster Unionist Party and I, as a member, have. We have been informed this afternoon that there were 430 written responses to the PFG, and I assume that civil servants and, indeed, Ministers have been working overtime in the past couple of weeks to bring forward the final PFG. My party and I welcome that, because for the past 12 months, we have been calling for a Programme for Government to be introduced. We also welcome the fact that it has been brought forward at this level.

In respect of corporation tax, I understand that the joint ministerial working group had its second meeting on 7 March. Given that the PFG sets out that an Executive announcement on the rate of corporation tax for Northern Ireland will be made in 2014-15, I am keen to know what progress has been made in identifying the cost to the block grant, as that is the first step in the process.

As regards the development of the Maze/Long Kesh as a regeneration site of regional significance, the Ulster Unionist Party wants the site to be taken forward in a practical manner through, for example, the relocation of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society and the Ulster Aviation Society. However, we do not support the allocation of substantial European funding to a conflict resolution centre, which is offensive to many victims. I note that, on page 33 of the PFG, there is a reference to private sector development at the Maze/Long Kesh site. I am keen to get some more information on that from the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

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

**Mr Elliott:** I also note on page 34 that the references to Ilex are missing even though references to Fort George and Ebrington are still included in the final Programme for Government.

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

**Mr Elliott:** I am also keen to get some information on that.

### **Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education):**

As Chair of the Education Committee, I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate on the Programme for Government. My comments are intended to be an overview of the issues that were raised with us during our consideration of the PFG. The Committee for Education welcomed the opportunity last year to respond to the consultation on the draft Programme for Government. The Committee gave the programme due time and consideration and wrote to stakeholders inviting them to comment and encouraging them to respond to the main consultation by OFMDFM. The Committee is disappointed that despite the consultation exercise, there have been minimal changes on education to the final Programme for Government and feels that the stakeholders could have been listened to in a more appropriate manner. Although the Committee welcomes the PFG in principle, it has some reservations about the Department of Education's ability to deliver on it.

The Committee notes that the only milestone that references secure funding relates to the Lisanelly complex in Omagh. The Committee believes that other programme initiatives should have a similar commitment if the PFG is to be successfully delivered. There is often a sense that Departments fail to carry through agreed policies with a sense of urgency. The Committee believes that the Executive should be required to produce a 10-year strategy for children and young people, rather than piecemeal policies that are introduced and scrapped in a short time.

The Committee recommended that the Programme for Government should include an objective to get the supply and demand of teachers into reasonable equilibrium by 2020, coupled with the strategic teacher workforce development plan. Given the many concerns out there, especially among teaching staff, that issue needs to be addressed urgently.

The Committee has also been made aware of concerns around schools being expected to deliver savings in an already constrained economic climate. Budget reductions are leading to sustained pressure on class sizes, redundancies and school projects that require financing. Given those concerns, particularly about financial structures, we have serious worries about pupil:teacher ratios and how they will impact on attaining and achieving certain other elements of the Programme for Government, which I will deal with in a moment.

The Committee recognises the fact that the Executive face financial constraints and challenges. Consequently, all Departments must make best use of their allocated resources. It is vital that the education of children and young people does not suffer. We need to ensure that we do all that we can to protect the valuable service that schools continue to provide in Northern Ireland.

In general, the Committee is disappointed that there is no requirement on Departments to collaborate on or achieve outcomes that are relevant to two or more Departments. That should be expected as an efficiency measure. The Committee calls on the Executive to take a more thoroughly co-ordinated and consistent approach to cross-departmental policy development. The Committee would also like a requirement on all Departments to publish an implementation plan that is linked to the PFG. In that regard, I welcome comments that were made earlier by the First Minister in his opening statement, when he mentioned plans

to produce a delivery plan. The expansion of that would ensure that there is a delivery plan by which we could judge how Departments, particularly the Department of Education — I speak as Chair of the Committee for Education — deliver against the Programme for Government's objectives.

The Committee believes that the Department of Education should plan children's education from nursery through to further education. In that vein, literacy and numeracy should be dealt with as a continuum from early years to the adult learner. The current split between the literacy and numeracy strategy, which has been developed in the Department of Education, and the essential skills strategy in the Department for Employment and Learning is unhelpful and, indeed, has created considerable challenges.

Going a step further is a joint 14-to-19 years policy, agreed with the Department for Employment and Learning, to ensure that, at the interface between formal education, further and higher education and employment, there is a focus on the economically necessary skills, subjects and courses that will contribute to rebalancing and rebuilding the Northern Ireland economy. In that regard, I particularly welcome the Programme for Government's commitment to increase uptake in places on economically relevant courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. That will make an invaluable contribution to ensuring that relevant skills are available to young people in order for them to contribute to the economic well-being and prosperity of Northern Ireland.

Although the Committee welcomes the commitment to ensure that at least one year of preschool education is available to every family who wants it, it is disappointed that the Department of Education did not go the extra mile — no pun intended — to include a commitment that those places will be within a reasonable and manageable distance of the family home. Of course, Members will remember that, not many months ago, we all faced situations in our constituencies in which places were offered some 50 or 60 miles away. That is not the best way to provide a local service for local communities.

The Committee welcomes the Department's commitment to improve overall achievement in GCSEs, particularly its focus on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, it would have liked a commitment to improve the achievement of multiple underachieving groups, rather than just that targeted group, as all young people deserve an equal opportunity to gain a high-quality education in Northern Ireland.

The Committee accepts that the schools estate in Northern Ireland requires auditing and rationalisation and is well aware of work that the Department is undertaking on viability audits and its commitment to shared education, which includes increasing the number of schools that share facilities by 2015. However, it would have preferred the inclusion of a commitment on the community use of schools, which has been mentioned in most significant audits of the Department from time to time, alongside commitments that are already given in the PFG.

The Committee urges the Department and the Executive to carefully manage the information that is released to school leaders and the general public in order to minimise the risk

of scaremongering because schools may be labelled as failing in a report, yet provide a quality service to our young people.

The Committee recognises that the commitment to create the Education and Skills Authority promises a structural change that aims to make a contribution to the delivery of high-quality and efficient services. I note that the Department is committed to establishing ESA by 2014-15, and that that pledge is contained under priority 5 of the PFG. However, I want to make it clear that the Committee will not be rushed into pushing the Bill that will create ESA through the House. It intends to take every opportunity to discuss that important legislation and to give it the priority and consideration that it deserves.

The Committee believes that there is little point having commitments and milestones unless there is a robust monitoring process to ensure their implementation. The commitments outlined should be captured through measurable performance indicators, and the Committee has suggested that quantifiable indicators should become the composite basis for monitoring progress on the delivery of the PFG. For instance, there is no indication — it is a matter of serious concern — of how the Department of Education and its body the Education and Training Inspectorate will measure whether literacy and numeracy levels have improved or whether additional resources have been successfully targeted. I ask respectfully that that issue is taken seriously. If we are to attain the objectives for literacy and numeracy, we have to ensure that we can adequately measure the outcomes. It is a critical issue in education. The Committee suggests that the Department should develop a detailed road map —

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

**Mr Storey:** — with specific timelines that indicate how each stated milestone will be achieved. As Chair of the Education Committee, I commend these comments to the House.

**Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel):** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chéad-Aire fosta. I thank the Minister for his opening statement and welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. The Committee for Finance and Personnel gave its response to the draft Programme for Government through the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in February.

From a finance and personnel perspective, the main focus of the Programme for Government is on growing a sustainable economy and investing in the future. The specific issues within those that I wish to concentrate on are the devolution of corporation tax, air passenger duty for direct long-haul flights, the extension of the small business rate relief scheme and the large retail levy, and the use of social clauses in public procurement contracts.

The devolution of corporation tax is a key commitment in the Programme for Government, which will go towards rebalancing the economy. It has the support, I believe, of all the parties in the House and the British Secretary of State, yet, at times, progress on that issue has been frustratingly slow. The Chair of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister referred to the meeting of the joint ministerial working group on 7 March, and the report of that group will be of interest to a number of Committees. It is desirable that we have some clarity and

focus on what the cost to the block grant will be, how that will be calculated with the Treasury and what agreements have been reached. We have heard wildly varying figures over the past number of months, and we want some clear sense of what formula will be used to agree the cost to the block grant of devolving that power. We also need a clear analysis on its affordability and the fair arrangements for the implementation of corporation tax powers once they are devolved to the Assembly, and some focus on the administrative changes and legislation that will be required. I realise that it is a fairly detailed area of work. However, there has been some concern not only in the Assembly but in the broader community and the business community that things have moved slower than was anticipated.

Members will be very much aware that investment decisions are taken on the basis of confidence, and I think that in progressing the discussions on corporation tax, we have to be mindful of instilling some confidence that there is momentum in the process and that it is leading us towards a satisfactory resolution of the issues.

#### 12.45 pm

The removal of air passenger duty on direct long-haul flights has been supported across the Chamber. The devolution of those powers will be in a Westminster Finance Bill in 2012. The Finance Committee will have a scrutiny function in the legislative consent motion that will implement that change here, and, obviously, the motion will be debated in the Assembly. Although it is a much smaller, but vital, issue for investment and direct linkages, particularly to North America, its importance is that, in some ways, it will set a template for the Assembly's handling of the corporation tax issue. There are useful lessons that can be road-tested when the air passenger duty legislative consent motion comes before the Committee and the House.

The small business rate relief scheme, to which the First Minister referred, and its consequence for the large retail levy, is another area of DFP interest in the Programme for Government. There is a very strong understanding across all parties and all Members of the difficulties that small local businesses, town centre businesses and small rural businesses are facing, and we are all seeing the increase in the numbers of boarded-up shops on high streets and in villages across the Six Counties. There was a strong desire among all parties and all Members to try to find some measure to assist the sustainability of small local businesses, and, in that sense, the Department of Finance's approach was to increase the large retail levy and to use that money to offset and assist the extension of the small business rate relief scheme. There was a clear recognition that that was a fairly blunt instrument with which to deal with the situation, but nonetheless, the matter was well debated here, and the Committee for Finance and Personnel carried out a substantial amount of work on the issue through its engagement with stakeholders.

Although the legislation was brought to the House under accelerated passage, the debate on it was substantial. There are clear commitments, from DFP's perspective, that need to be adhered to for the 2015 non-domestic rates revaluation and for reviews on the effectiveness of the small business rate relief scheme, and we will work with the Department to ensure that that happens. Hopefully, it will bring the commitment in the Programme for Government into

a more regulated form of assisting small businesses and of rates overall, which can direct interventions where the Executive feel they are necessary to sustain the local economy.

The First Minister also referred specifically to the use of social clauses in procurement contracts. That, again, has strong support across all parties in the Assembly, and there is a strong sense that our public spending gives us the ability to effect positive social and economic outcomes and positive local outcomes. The assurances in the Programme for Government on that are very welcome, as is the practice across some Departments, but there is a concern in the Committee and beyond that some Departments seem to believe that references to equality or health and safety measures can somehow cover their commitment to use social clauses in contracts. Social clauses should become the norm in contracts.

There is a clear expectation across the Chamber that what we have considered to be social clauses are those that deal with issues such as apprenticeships, the long-term unemployed and environmental outcomes. There is work to be done by the Central Procurement Directorate and the Executive to give us a clear definition of what we consider to be social clauses. That will ensure that no Departments escape the proper development of social clauses by referring to equality or health and safety issues and by including them as a box-ticking exercise to show that social clauses have been in a contract. The commitment to that is welcome, but I think that there is a need for clarity and consistency across Departments to ensure that we have the proper outcomes and that what we collectively consider to be the proper usage of social clauses to achieve positive local, social and economic outcomes is being delivered consistently across all Departments.

Those are just some of the issues that are of a DFP interest. I welcome the tabling of the motion, and I look forward to the rest of the debate. I encourage support for the Programme for Government.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on behalf of the SDLP in recognising the Programme for Government, which has been somewhat long awaited. I have to draw a contrast between the very short turnaround period from the closure of consultee reports with the eight months to one year that was required to look at that which followed the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. Let us hope that the short time period does not reflect a lack of commitment by the Executive to listen to what the stakeholders had to say about the Programme for Government. After all, it is a three-year Programme for Government at a time of severe hardship when many people are crying out for help. It is a time when people are hoping that devolution will make a difference to their lives.

The document contains a number of good points. Some of the positive elements include challenging targets in tourism, and I note with interest how the First Minister lauded, quite properly, our sporting and movie stars who have achieved world-class status, prizes and recognition. I contrast that with the slashing of the DCAL budget, and I wonder whether that is the best way in which we should be nurturing in our young people ambitious targets for hero worship. They want to follow their stars but lack the financial assistance to reach that acclaim and those targets.

The Programme for Government also includes a financial capability strategy, and we are happy that that has been taken on board. In our party's contribution in response to the draft PFG, we had asked for that. Social clauses are also included, and a lot of work is to be done around procurement and in educating some of our smaller firms and businesses in how to secure tenders for government work in particular. The inclusion of the social clauses will provide an opportunity to assist the needs of our long-term unemployed, and I look forward to the working out of those.

As the First Minister referred to, in comparison to the draft Programme for Government, there are more specific targets and measures on combating fuel poverty. The extension of the social protection fund is very much welcomed, although I am not sure which pot of money that has come from because, initially, there was only £20 million for that in the first year. We will wait to hear from the First Minister or others about where that money is coming from.

There are too many other concerns. The document contains no legislative programme to ensure implementation and delivery. It is unclear where it links with the finance programme. It is too vague on key commitments, detail and measurable targets, and those comments have been made not only by the SDLP but by many stakeholders, including in response to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's lack of commitment to the eradication of TB and on the comments that the Chair of the Education Committee outlined on the pressures facing the education sector following CCMS and the viability —

**Ms Ritchie:** I thank the Member for giving way. Will she give consideration in her speech to how the Programme for Government could provide, or whether it provides, solutions to counter the impact of welfare reform proposals, the projected increases in fuel duties in next week's UK Budget, the rising cost of energy prices, the general economic recession and, shall we say, the unintended consequences for communities and individuals?

**Mrs D Kelly:** The Member makes a number of good points about welfare reform and the impact that it will have. I will come to that in due course.

The target to create 25,000 jobs is but a drop in the ocean given that the unemployment rate is over 60,000. Some commentators suggested in the media over the weekend that Northern Ireland remains the worst for rising jobless totals, the number of home repossessions and the fact that there is no security blanket for those who are at risk of losing their home, unlike in parts of GB where there is some mortgage relief.

Many people who have probably worked all their life and have now become unemployed will, for the first time, be recipients of welfare reform, never mind those who have had to depend on it for many years. The SDLP as a party, is very concerned about the lack of vision to deal with the proposed welfare reforms and the economic recession that we are still in. In fact, as I understand it, the North is the only part of Northern Ireland and GB that is still in a recession. *[Interruption.]* No, I am quite sure what I need; I do not need any help from across the way.

The coalition Government's welfare cuts and major aspects of their welfare reform agenda are having, and will continue to have, a significant detrimental impact on our community.

Worryingly, given the potential impact of welfare reform, the document contains only one substantive reference to it. As part of a wider, laudable but immeasurable commitment to alleviate hardship comes a commitment to establish an advisory group to assist Ministers. That is the only proposal that the draft Programme for Government has for that area. The SDLP believes that given the grave nature of the welfare reform proposals for Northern Ireland, especially when taking into account our historically high levels of disadvantage, the Executive must ensure that they make opposition to the damaging aspects of welfare reform the highest priority and pursue all possible legal and operational flexibilities and financial support to mitigate the impact of welfare cuts and changes imposed on Northern Ireland. To assist people to cope with the change to universal credit and to deal with debt, the Programme for Government should include the development of a financial capability strategy. Northern Ireland is the only region undergoing welfare reform, and I welcome the fact that the strategy will be in place. I hope that we see an action plan in the medium term.

A number of Members have commented on childcare and child poverty. There is nothing in the draft Programme for Government to give one confidence that the Executive will deliver on promises that they made in the previous Programme for Government, bearing in mind that only 40% of the targets in the previous Programme for Government were met. Perhaps that really underscores why there are fewer measurable commitments in this Programme for Government. You really do not want to stand up many of the Departments to proper scrutiny.

As we know, there are also huge changes to the public sector through the threatened closure of many of our schools and colleges and the closure and termination of many of our services in the health and social care sector. That is a major concern. The Executive have, for a long time, been kicking many of the tough decisions down the road, but this Programme for Government is not ambitious and does not reflect the concerns that many people have. This Programme for Government has not given much commitment to the rebalancing of the Northern Ireland economy, other than the talk about corporation tax. There is a lack of other ambitions on tax-varying powers and, indeed, no ambition about how to raise some of the funds that are required.

**Ms Ritchie:** Will the Member give way?

**Mrs D Kelly:** Only because it is you.

**Ms Ritchie:** I thank the Member for giving way. Would the Member consider it helpful if, in their winding-up speech, the First Minister and deputy First Minister could provide us with an update from the ministerial working group on rebalancing the economy, which, I understand, met last week, and an update from the joint consultative committee, which will have dealt with the disputatious nature of the £18 billion that was supposed to be part of the capital dividend for devolution and would very much have contributed to our local economy and pump-primed the construction industry?

**1.00 pm**

**Mrs D Kelly:** Given the time, yes. I also note the absence of any ambitious targets around North/South co-operation and the failure yet again to produce a —

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

**Mrs D Kelly:** — time frame for a single equality Bill.

**Mr Lyttle:** I support the motion and welcome the publication of the Programme for Government. It is vital for any Government to listen to the concerns of people and to clearly communicate a vision, priorities and commitments to provide direction and hope to a community. I believe that the Programme for Government will provide a platform for the talent, enterprise and endeavour of our people to drive social and economic change in Northern Ireland.

Admittedly, our system of mandatory coalition government is unique and not always conducive to joined-up delivery, so I welcome the cross-cutting nature of each of the five main priorities in the programme, and I hope that they will encourage more collaborative and cross-departmental delivery. The Alliance Party would go further to ensure joined-up government by placing a statutory duty on Departments to co-operate. We believe that that legislative duty would further promote joined-up working for vital policy delivery in key areas.

We are all Members of a legislative Assembly, so I share concerns about the absence of a legislative programme in the document. The Programme for Government makes frequent reference to strategies but few commitments to specific legislation. Although strategies and action plans are, of course, central to policy delivery, there are key areas where legislation is essential. The Alliance Party published a legislative programme identifying Bills that the Assembly could bring forward, including a shared housing Bill, a comprehensive languages Bill, a single equality Bill and a single mental health and mental capacity Bill. Other organisations have also identified areas, such as race relations and disability rights, where legislative change is urgently needed to ensure that people in Northern Ireland have the same protection as that served to the rest of these islands.

I do, of course, welcome the priority that the Programme for Government has placed on our economy. It is clear that we must work together to rebalance our economy and deliver long-term, sustainable economic growth and job creation for Northern Ireland. I particularly welcome commitments to increased investment, to prioritising skills delivery, to increasing qualifications and to increasing the uptake of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. Those commitments are vital if we are to create the relevantly skilled workforce and attract the investment needed in Northern Ireland.

I also welcome specific measures to support economic growth, including the extension of the small business rate relief scheme, support for social enterprise and efforts to maximise the excellent tourism product that we are able to offer on a world stage. It is also important that we offer hope to our young people. We have an Executive strategy for employment, education and training for our young people, and the Minister for Employment is working hard to deliver a specific youth employment intervention programme with the support of the Minister of Finance. We need action on those areas urgently.

Another key aspect of rebuilding our economy and welfare reform is to help people back into work. A significant barrier to employment for many people is the lack of affordable childcare in Northern Ireland. I therefore welcome the

commitment to deliver the long-overdue childcare strategy. However, as with other strategies, such as that on child poverty, it is essential that there is no delay in bringing forward action in that area. I also hope and expect that any childcare strategy and action plan will seek to raise awareness of childcare voucher schemes and promote the uptake of the childcare element of working tax credit, almost £6 million of which, it is estimated, could be going unclaimed each year. Promoting awareness of assistance that is already available but underutilised is a cost-effective way of encouraging parents back into employment.

Thankfully, we in Northern Ireland are living longer. I would like to see older people given greater recognition in the Programme for Government. Poverty and social exclusion among older people are serious issues, and, every week, approximately £2 million in pension credit could be going unclaimed. That is money that could mean the difference between living above or below the poverty line and could benefit the health and well-being of older people but which is lost from our economy.

**Mr McCarthy:** I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that it was rather disappointing to hear only last week the Minister for Social Development suggest that another look might be taken at senior citizens and their SmartPasses? In other words, the free travel arrangements could be taken away from some of our senior citizens, which would be to their detriment.

**Mr Lyttle:** I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree that we must put the rights and the active ageing of our older people at the centre of all our policy in government. I would also like to see our Government —

**Mr P Robinson:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Lyttle:** Certainly.

**Mr P Robinson:** I am grateful. Before the scaremongering starts, let us be very clear: the DUP brought in the free fares scheme for our senior citizens, and the DUP will ensure that it remains.

**Mr Lyttle:** I thank the — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Allow the Member to continue. The Member must be heard.

**Mr Lyttle:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the First Minister for his reassurances on that.

I also welcome the commitment to implement reforms to our social care system. It is vital that those reforms ensure that social care for our older people is based on rights, entitlements and fairness. Investing in preventative measures ensures that older people can remain at home rather than be admitted to hospital.

As a member of the Alliance Party, I welcome that the Programme for Government makes building a strong, shared and united community a key and explicit aim. My party has stood for cross-community co-operation and has highlighted the human and economic waste that division causes. We will continue to hold the Government to account for their practical action in pursuit of a better and shared future for all. I believe that the Programme for Government could have explicitly acknowledged that the duplication of services is no longer sustainable or acceptable in a united community.

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

**Mr Lyttle:** Yes. I am trying to get on, but go ahead.

**Mr Humphrey:** I am grateful to the Member; I will not take up much of his time. I agree with and have great sympathy for his point about shared services across the community. In the real world, however, will the Member explain how that can be implemented in a divided city such as Belfast?

**Mr Lyttle:** I thank the Member for his intervention. That might be for a whole other debate on another day, but I appreciate that there are logistical challenges with the issue. However, we need to put clear actions in place to do that.

I welcome the long overdue commitment to make the Education and Skills Authority operational by 2013. The target date that the previous Programme for Government set for the establishment of a single Education and Skills Authority was 2009. My party consistently called for the establishment of a single body and campaigned for increased sharing and integration in the education system. I do not believe that it is sustainable or desirable to keep our children segregated in our schools. Therefore, I reiterate my concern that the inclusion of the controlled and maintained sectors is explicit in the proposed Education and Skills Authority, but I have yet to see any clear reciprocal mechanism for the integrated sector. That has not done too much to address doubts about the Executive's ability to deliver not just words but concrete action on a shared future. Unfortunately, the Programme for Government also fails to resolve the unregulated post-primary transfer. I think that most of us agree that we will continue to fail our children and young people every year until the issue is addressed.

I endorse the Executive's commitment to develop long-term approaches to deal with issues such as fuel poverty. Although the one-off payment that the social protection fund provided was of assistance to many vulnerable people this year, it is essential that more sustainable long-term measures are developed, including investment in double glazing, energy efficiency and environmentally friendly heating and insulation, which has been mentioned.

The Alliance Party's priority commitment remains the delivery of a shared and better future for all in Northern Ireland. Therefore, I welcome the commitment that the programme gives to the delivery of an overarching cross-departmental strategy to build a cohesive, shared and integrated community in Northern Ireland. A devolved Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has yet to deliver on that issue. I sincerely hope that the Executive can be the first to action meaningful and fundamental change in integrated education and mixed housing and that they can deliver shared public space in Northern Ireland for all to enjoy. I also believe that, if we are to build a united community, we must deal with our past, which has a profound impact on our divided present.

I welcome the work to complete more ambitious targets for delivery. They must be measurable and monitored in an open and transparent manner. Although I have expressed some concerns —

**Mr Speaker:** The Member's time has almost gone.

**Mr Lyttle:** — about how we would do things differently, I broadly endorse the Programme for Government, and I

commit to encouraging an approach and ideas that breed delivery on, and a strategic direction for, the rebuilding of our economy.

**Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice):** I am pleased to speak in the debate as Chairman of the Justice Committee.

The Programme for Government sets out the Executive's key priorities for the next four years, and I welcome the commitments that have been included in relation to improving the justice system for all our citizens. Of great importance to the public is the level of crime, particularly serious crime — the fear of which can have a huge impact on people's lives — and antisocial behaviour, which people often feel is not tackled quickly or robustly enough. That is recognised in the Programme for Government, with the inclusion of commitments to reduce the level of serious crime and to tackle crime against older and vulnerable people — through more effective and appropriate sentences and other measures — and to improve community safety by tackling antisocial behaviour. It is important that progress is made in these areas to ensure confidence in the criminal justice system. The Committee has also highlighted the need for targets to reduce serious crime to be consistent with the policing plan for 2012-15.

I welcome the commitment to take forward any necessary changes to tackling crime against older and vulnerable people by imposing more effective and appropriate sentences, as part of the Department of Justice's legislative programme. The House has previously debated the issue of attacks on the elderly, and it sent out the clear message that attacks on the elderly should not and will not be tolerated, and the Programme for Government takes action on that.

The Committee is due to receive a briefing on the draft community safety strategy before the end of March, and it will no doubt want to be satisfied that robust measures to tackle antisocial behaviour are included in the strategy to ensure that the Programme for Government outputs and milestones in that area can be delivered.

I turn to the three major, independent reviews undertaken in the justice system in the past 18 months: the reviews of prisons, youth justice and access to justice. These will be key pieces of work for the Minister and the Department, in which the Committee intends to be closely involved, over the next three years.

The reform and modernisation of the Prison Service has commenced, and the Committee has been receiving regular briefings from the director general of the Prison Service and his senior officials on progress in delivering the strategic efficiency and effectiveness programme and the recommendations in the prison review team's report. The Committee has also been kept fully briefed on the progress of the Prison Service exit scheme and recruitment competition for new custody officers, both of which are delivery milestones in the Programme for Government 2012-13.

I will speak briefly as a member of the DUP. On the issue of Prison Service emblems, name and badge, which was raised in the House by the Minister of Justice, our party has made it clear that we will not allow any change to happen. That was clarified at Committee, when the director general made it clear that this is not part of the reform programme that he is taking forward. It is an issue that will not be



coming to the table, because we will not be allowing it to be dealt with. If officials in that Department do not understand how the St Andrews Agreement accountability measures operate, I would like to think that Members should be able to understand how those measures work.

The exit scheme — I have declared an interest on numerous occasions because I have a family member in the Prison Service — was highlighted again at Committee last week. The Committee has concerns about the way in which the scheme is being handled by the Prison Service. Staff were told that they would be allowed to leave with dignity and respect. However, it is unacceptable that the 323 officers involved do not know if they will get out or when they will be told. The Committee has told the Prison Service that that needs to be resolved, and, indeed, I have spoken to the Minister a number of times. Staff were already demoralised. They are even more demoralised now because of the way that the scheme is being handled.

The issue of the very recent resignations of the director general and the change manager and the likely impact on the delivery of the programme were also highlighted at the meeting. The Committee has requested a detailed implementation plan with specific timescales and will use it to monitor progress closely, particularly in relation to the delivery of the commitments in the Programme for Government in that area.

#### 1.15 pm

In relation to the review of access to justice and the review of youth justice, the Committee is expecting details of how the Minister intends to take them forward. It will wish to scrutinise those proposals and the associated action plans, and will want to discuss them with the Minister.

The Committee welcomes the inclusion of a commitment to reduce the number of peace walls but has emphasised that it is a very sensitive issue within communities. Progress on this must be based on a willingness from the local community to engage and it must be taken forward at a pace with which a particular community is comfortable, if the desired outcome is to be achieved.

**Mr Humphrey:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way and I welcome the comment he has just made. When politicians make comments from their ivory towers about peace walls being removed from interfaces, the people who have to deal with the daily difficulty of living there are frightened to the core. It is grossly irresponsible of politicians to do that. I welcome the Member's comments.

**Mr Givan:** I agree with the Member entirely, appreciate the constituency that he represents and the active work that he is involved in on this issue. He brings expertise to the House in that regard.

With respect to capital projects, the Committee welcomes the inclusion of a commitment to construct a new police, prison and fire service training college at Desertcreat, and for it to be substantially completed by 2014-15. Having pressed the Department for progress on a number of occasions, the Committee also highlighted the need for the procurement contract to include social clauses so that the local community can benefit from that project.

I turn to the delivery of the Programme for Government. The Committee will regularly monitor the performance of the Department of Justice against the relevant commitments and milestones in the Programme for Government. Further consideration may need to be given to how progress on the delivery of the inputs required from other Departments to achieve some of the Department of Justice's commitments and outputs, such as improving community safety by tackling antisocial behaviour, will be monitored and measured. The Committee will wish to keep that under review.

I will now briefly make comments in my capacity as an MLA for Lagan Valley. I welcome the recommendation for the development of the Maze/Long Kesh site. That site is critical, not just for the people of Lagan Valley, but for all of Northern Ireland. The Programme for Government recognises that regional significance. We must not allow the future development of the site to be held hostage by its past. Proposals for the site have been taken forward from when David Trimble was First Minister. David Trimble appointed David Campbell to be the chair of the Maze panel, and he is UUP chairman to this day. In those proposals was the recommendation to deal with the retained element of the site. The Ulster Unionist Party supported it then, it was chaired by David Campbell, and now that party seeks to play politics with that issue. Given the number of members of my family who served in the Prison Service, I understand more acutely than most the sensitivities around this issue. David Campbell got it right when he chaired that body. He put in specific recommendations that it should be neutral, and all of that. Therefore, there will be no glorification of what happened at that site. Quite the opposite: what happened was wrong, and the message that it was wrong should be told. To cynically use victims in the way in which the Ulster Unionist Party now uses them is reprehensible.

**Mr Elliott:** I thank the Member for giving way. Does he recognise and accept that the original proposals for the Maze were for a huge development, including proposals for a multi-sports stadium and other developments that will now not happen?

**Mr Givan:** I do not know whether that has changed the position of the Ulster Unionist Party, which appointed the chair of the body that put forward proposals to ensure that the site would be dealt with sensitively. The Member's commentary is, in my view, a poor reflection of where the Ulster Unionist Party was in regard to the development of the site, and where it is today. This site must be developed; it has to be developed.

**Mr A Maginness:** I remind the Member that many in his own party expressed serious reservations about that site. In fact, they characterised it as being a shrine to terrorism.

**Mr Givan:** My party has made it very clear that this cannot in any way be a shrine to terrorism, and the mechanisms that are in place ensure that that will not be the case. To play politics with that issue now, however, and the way the Ulster Unionist Party is handling this, is reprehensible and it should not be doing it in the way that it does. Indeed, the leader —

**Mr Speaker:** The time is almost gone.

**Mr Givan:** At that, I will conclude. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

**Mr A Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development):** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I speak as the Chair of the Social Development Committee. Obviously, the Committee came at this from a number of perspectives. Of course, every party and member around the table had their own views, and we took great care to try our best to consult a wide range of stakeholder organisations, which themselves had considerable expertise in a number of the fundamentals in the draft Programme for Government.

The Committee took the view in the early part of its discussions that there were concerns about when the draft Programme for Government was brought forward and the relatively short time within which it could then be fully considered. As I said, however, the Committee then endeavoured to consult as wide a range of organisations as it could, and that was done with integrity and productively.

The Committee acknowledges that the draft Programme for Government was set against the backdrop of a considerable reduction in the block grant that the Executive were anticipating. Therefore, it very much welcomes the fact that the Executive have agreed to take a number of important mitigating actions to minimise the impact that the cuts to the block grant would have, which were important to try to offset those impacts on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Against that background, therefore, and particularly within our remit, the Committee welcomed the emphasis in the Programme for Government document on tackling disadvantage and was very glad to see that that formed part of priority 2 along with key health and education issues. It was important for the Committee that the Programme for Government, therefore, recognised that disadvantage is not about just economic disadvantage, because poverty brings with it disadvantage in health, education and, of course, equality of opportunity. Therefore, we welcome the fact that the Programme for Government establishes a framework within which our young people especially have more opportunities to end that cycle of disadvantage. So, the Committee was glad to see that equality was a guiding principle underpinning the rebuilding of the economy.

There were a number of concerns in respect of housing, not least that the target in the draft Programme for Government was for the provision of 8,000 social and affordable homes. Members expressed the view that that was not enough given the thousands of people on the waiting list. In fact, we believe that up to 20,000 are categorised as being in housing stress. Nevertheless, the Committee took the view that that is an important start and is a target that must be met.

We are keen to continue to engage with the Department on an overall housing strategy. The Department came forward and said that, obviously, we need to have an overarching housing strategy that will encompass social housing, the private sector and housing associations. That is an important development that we look forward to engaging on with the Department in the very near future because we have to address the critical issue of housing need.

Fuel poverty is an important issue for all of us and it was certainly an issue that the Committee recently took on board as a serious initiative. We will soon be coming back to the Assembly with our final report into the work that we have begun on fuel poverty. We clearly recognise that, although the Department for Social Development (DSD) has the lead

within the Executive to tackle fuel poverty, it is a multi-agency and cross-departmental responsibility. Therefore, we want to see —

**Mr Douglas:** I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that the initiative that the Social Development Committee took to bring the various sections of government and heads of Departments together was very successful? We have to ensure that Departments work together if we are to have a Programme for Government that will have the biggest impact.

**Mr A Maskey:** I thank the Member for that. I think that the initiative we took, although it dealt specifically with fuel poverty — I remind Members that we brought together eight Departments, eight Committees, 30-odd stakeholder organisations and, at one event, more than 90 people, all at relatively senior levels in their Departments, Committees and different organisations — was about tackling fuel poverty at source and putting the spotlight on that issue as best we could. More importantly, it was about bringing forward constructive ideas. Also, it was to show, when we hear people saying that things have to be joined up, that the Assembly has to be joined up as well. It is not enough for us, as Members, to say that Departments have to be joined up or that others have to be joined up: we, as an Assembly, and particularly in Committees, have to demonstrate that we can be joined up when it comes to cross-cutting issues. I thank the Member for drawing attention to that matter.

We recognise that there are commitments around what are described as a range of initiatives to tackle fuel poverty in the Programme for Government, and we would like to see those teased out and clearly focused in the very near future.

As far as social enterprise, or the third sector, is concerned, we are very concerned to protect what is a very important sector. We all know that community organisations and other stakeholders play a very important part in general society, and we want to see as much work as possible being carried out by the Department to support that sector on a longer-term, sustainable and strategic basis. So, we look forward to working with the Department and the broader community and voluntary sector to ensure that we maximise the asset that is there for all.

I must also mention welfare reform, because it is clearly an issue that will fall directly into our laps, as a Committee, in the very near future. All parties are very aware that there may well be, and likely will be, some very seriously negative impacts on the people we, collectively, represent. Therefore, we welcome the fact that the Executive have established an advisory group, which will work with the Executive to see where we can take measures to alleviate the worst aspects of this particular welfare reform agenda, as it is called: many of us call it a welfare cuts agenda. With the advisory group, and with close scrutiny of the Bill, the Committee believes that it can work with all concerned to try to protect the most vulnerable and most disadvantaged.

In conclusion, the Committee for Social Development will engage with the Department. The Committee had an issue initially with the draft Programme for Government in that some people felt that it did not carry enough milestones, targets and objectives on a kind of hard, task basis. At the same time, the Department has very firmly given us a commitment to bring forward its implementation plan once

the Programme for Government has been agreed by the Assembly and the Executive. We look forward to working with the Department when it brings forward its implementation plan. We will work with the Department on that plan very constructively and robustly to ensure that the objectives and targets set out in the Programme for Government are delivered for all of the people who we, collectively, represent.

Finally, speaking as an MLA, my party and I accept that there are difficult and challenging times ahead. However, the Executive are committed to doing what they can to develop measures to build the economy, help people into work by creating jobs and work with all of the very important stakeholders who are working at the coalface, whether it be in welfare reform, education, health and all of the other very important community assets.

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

We look forward to the development of the Programme for Government. We know that it is set against the very negative financial backdrop of the cuts that have come from London. Nevertheless, I wish the Executive well in meeting those challenges. I have no doubt that there is enough innovation, drive and commitment in the draft Programme for Government that, if it is carried through and delivered on, we will make lives a bit better for the people we represent.

**Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development):** I rise as Chairperson of the Committee to present the Committee's view on this Programme for Government. As part of the Committee's scrutiny process, we met Minister O'Neill and her officials on 14 February, when she outlined the Department's input into the draft Programme for Government. I and other Committee members shared a number of concerns with her. The Committee then met departmental officials on 28 February to further discuss the draft Programme in greater detail, and a number of concerns were raised by me and other Committee members.

Those include what the Committee considers to be serious omissions, particularly around the eradication of bovine TB, forestry issues, countryside management and Europe. I will come back to those issues shortly, particularly to bovine TB.

### 1.30 pm

The four DARD commitments that were outlined by the Minister and her officials are to bring forward a £13 million package to tackle rural poverty and social and economic isolation in the next three years; to eradicate brucellosis by March 2014; to develop a strategic plan for the agrifood sector, in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; and to advance the relocation of the headquarters of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to a rural area by 2015. I shall take each target in turn and present the Committee's view.

I noted that the target on rural poverty and social and economic isolation is under priority 2. The Committee welcomes the capital injection on that issue and recognises the fact that the Department has launched the rural poverty and social isolation framework, which outlines the priority areas and actions that the Department will lead on to address those issues. From the briefing by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Committee understands that the programme target is to build on the

work undertaken in the previous Programme for Government. It is also part of the wider rural development programme. The Committee hopes that the actions identified by the Department are realised and that it is not a case of funds being soaked up by the administration of the scheme rather than actual investment in the rural economy. The Committee also asked about how that aspect of the Programme for Government will be aligned to the targeting social need strategy. We look forward to seeing the development of working documents and action plans for delivery in the near future.

Although I welcome the target of the eradication of brucellosis by March 2014, it is worthy of note that the last confirmed case of the disease was recorded in July 2011. There has been a steady decline since 2008, which is progress towards being brucellosis-free, and the Committee supports DARD in that. It is a terrible disease and is totally deserving of being a Programme for Government target. The Committee fully supports the Department, the PSNI and the industry in the identification and prosecution of the minority who deliberately infect their livestock to gain a financial advantage. Officials outlined the cost to the economy of a brucellosis outbreak, which would be between £10 million and £20 million. Becoming brucellosis-free will also free up staff, vet time, resources and administration support that can be directed elsewhere — to bovine TB, for example.

All in all, there is a broad welcome for the target. However, the Committee is extremely concerned and disappointed that no targets have been set for the eradication of TB. It is hard to comprehend how an issue of such magnitude has been omitted from the Programme for Government. The fact that it was included in the previous Programme for Government with a target of reducing the annual herd incidence of TB by 27% adds to the confusion being experienced by the industry. When pressed on that in Committee, departmental officials admitted that it was not included because they could not find a SMART target that they could commit to. They stated:

*"We could not come up with a target that we could achieve, deliver or aspire to."*

Additionally, Minister O'Neill said that she was not confident that TB could be eradicated in the Programme for Government timescale. That is simply not good enough. Just because something is hard does not mean to say that it should not be included as a target. The Committee firmly believes that, if officials put their minds to it, they could come up with SMART targets on the reduction and progress to eradication that could be achieved in the timescale.

One wonders what the Department's mindset is when it has decided not to include it, bearing in mind the Public Accounts Committee's report on the control of bovine TB in Northern Ireland, published in June 2009, which stated that £200 million of taxpayers' money had not been explicitly aimed at the eradication of TB and that the Department had failed to meet the challenge. The Committee calls on the Department to develop a more strategic approach to tackling bovine TB, with a clear focus on the reduction and eradication of the disease. That will help to bring Northern Ireland in line with the vast majority of the rest of Europe. We expect to see greater urgency in the Department to achieve that. In fact, I call on the Minister and the Executive to consider adding that as a priority to the Programme for Government.

The development of a strategic plan for the agrifood sector in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is a good example of joined-up government, which the Committee welcomes. The agrifood sector contributes in excess of £3 billion to the economy. It employs almost 100,000 people and is the only sector to have shown sustained growth over the past few years. The Department has advised that it plans to develop the current Focus on Food strategy. The Committee has concerns that the Republic of Ireland has already published its 2020 strategy and feels that the Department is lagging behind in the development of the strategy and has displayed a lack of ambition and drive at a time when the agrifood sector has such a positive future.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I welcome the opportunity to intervene on that point. Our party held a conference on the agrifood sector only last week, and we learned that we are some two years behind the South of Ireland. There is no mention in the document of the lifting of the milk quota or CAP reforms and the implications that that will have for agriculture. Does the Member agree that that is a serious omission by the Minister?

**Mr Frew:** Thank you for your intervention, and thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for allowing it. Yes, I do. It is something that the Minister must take very seriously. Of course, we cannot include everything in the Programme for Government. This Programme for Government is set in a very focused and directed way, and we welcome that, as does, I am sure, the Assembly. However, there must be an onus on Departments to make sure that they include everything that will have the greatest impact on our people in Northern Ireland.

It is difficult to comment on the Department's target regarding the construction and refurbishment of a hypothetical building in a hypothetical location by 2015. Although the Committee would welcome investment in the construction industry, which is very important and is dear to my heart, it has concerns that the estimated £26 million costs will not be sufficient to complete the project. We await sight of the business plan to ensure that targets and budgets are achievable.

The Committee has also expressed concern that each of the four targets will not have an adequate budget allocated to it and that a bid for additional resources may have to be made. The Department has advised us that, as yet, no money has been set aside or identified for two of its targets. That is a major concern for the Committee, particularly given the financial constraints that we face.

The Committee feels that the targets identified by the Department are not challenging enough. The Department has chosen the easy option and has chosen to omit real and meaningful targets, such as the eradication of bovine TB, which, to me, is critical to the health and well-being of the farming and agriculture industry in the future.

The Committee also understands that the detail of other missing priorities, such as targets for forestry, will be in the 2012-13 departmental business plan. The Committee hopes to look at that plan post Easter and will seek to guarantee that it will contain significant and quantifiable targets.

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

**Mr Frew:** I will. You have just caught me.

**Mr McMullan:** Does the Member agree that the legal cases that are going on now in England and Wales could have a bearing on anything to do with the bovine cases here?

**Mr Frew:** I thank the Member for his intervention, but I do not accept that. The legal aspect centres on only one element of an eradication plan and relates to reservoirs and wildlife. There is still so much more that the Department and the Minister could do to tackle bovine TB, and I would like to see it happen.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I speak as our party's education spokesman, but, first, may I give an overarching welcome to the arrival of the Programme for Government to the Floor? We need not rehearse the importance, relevance and timeliness that we attached to devising a Programme for Government; that is well documented.

We now move to the fact that, once this is agreed, as it undoubtedly will be, delivery becomes king. I noted with interest the comments that the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party made at its last party conference, in La Mon. He said:

*"People want to see the Executive taking decisions and making a difference. That's what we are elected to do. The new imperative is getting things done."*

I could be churlish and wonder what the imperative was under the last mandate, but the new imperative is getting things done, which is to be supported, as are his words in opening the debate that we must achieve delivery in a way that is seen, felt and understood on the ground. We will have no difficulty supporting that.

Please allow me, however, a moment of scepticism about the measures of delivery. Last week, as we reviewed the performance of the previous Programme for Government with officials at the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, we discovered that the traffic light system of red, amber and green, which had been the original measure of achievement, had been amended, and a fourth category of amber-green inserted between amber and green. It seems to me that that greatly impacts on the percentage of measures that could be described as achieved. I believe that one member mentioned the word "gerrymander" at that Committee meeting, but I will leave it there and move on.

I want to spend the rest of my time addressing the Programme for Government under the theme of education, focusing on three areas: the point of education, the schools estate and special educational need. It may seem a little simplistic to say that I want to talk about the point of education. However, having been party spokesman and Deputy Chair of the Education Committee for only five weeks, I am already very clear that you can spend long hours debating education without ever mentioning pupils. I want to mention them now.

In a former life, as a school governor, I was sometimes asked to speak at open days to prospective parents and pupils. I used to talk about the spark that lies within every child, without exception. It is a spark of ability, creativity and talent. Our job is to find that spark and not get hung up about whether it is academic or vocational, sporting or artistic. We simply need to find it and give the child the tools to grow that spark into a passion for learning and for

life. Last year, I was delighted to come across a book called 'The Element', written by creative thinker Sir Ken Robinson, who, I believe, has previously advised the Department for Employment and Learning and is currently advising the Ilex project in Londonderry. Sir Ken's 'Element' is my spark. I hope that, as we go forward with the educational elements of the Programme for Government, we can bear in mind that that spark is king to the future of our children.

Sir Ken also addresses post-primary education and how you transfer in a way that the Programme for Government does not. I commend this thought to you: what we need to do is address the question of post-primary transfer and recognise that, under the 11-plus, we asked the wrong question of our children. Previously, we asked them, "How intelligent are you?", and then determined to measure that in the narrow ground of their academic ability in maths, English and science. Sir Ken says that that is the wrong question. The right question is "In what way are you intelligent? Are you academic, vocational, sporting or artistic?".

I suggest that there is, perhaps, more hope of agreement in the House than some people might imagine about the future of post-primary transfer. I will quote the Education Minister, speaking in the Chamber on 13 December last year:

*"I am not fixated on the title that a school wishes to give itself. It can call itself a grammar school, high school, college; I am not fixated on its title." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 69, p320, col 2].*

He goes on to say:

*"I want to see an education estate that is open to all young people and centres of education that do not ask children at the age of 11, 'are you clever?', but ask, 'how are you clever?' It is the duty of educationalists to grow that acorn and to light the spirit of education in every pupil." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 69, p320, col 2].*

I suggest that there is not much between what the Minister said in December 2011 and what I say in March 2012. Think only of Rory McIlroy, who attended a grammar school a few miles from the Building. Had he been forced to complete only an academic education, only the Members for North Down might know him as perhaps an up-and-coming solicitor in Hollywood and not a global superstar.

#### 1.45 pm

I move to the schools estate, where there is a real challenge of delivery, with four systems and an incredibly complex map of governance. My party supports a two-phased move to a single system of education, with a middle ground of shared resources. I recognise and applaud the commitment in the Programme for Government to a greater emphasis on sharing resources. However, there are no real targets, and I would like to see more as we move forward. I also recognise the need in the House to set the strategic direction for shared resources and to open the way for local solutions to make it happen. We must recognise that people and communities are likely to move forward at different speeds and at different times. In evidence to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the First Minister said:

*"We also see education as a way of tackling the divisions in our society. That is why we have committed*

*to establishing a ministerial advisory group to explore and bring forward recommendations to the Minister of Education on how to advance shared education."*

I would like to see that ministerial advisory group up and running, its terms of reference and the timescale for it to report.

This party will support the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority if it is a better way of administering the schools estate, but not if it is a back door to social engineering.

My third point relates to special educational needs. I am surprised that it has become the biggest issue for families who have approached me for advocacy since I joined the Education Committee. Several primary-school principals have taken me into their study and produced the manual from the Department on special educational needs. It is a big manual containing 439 A4 pages, and it is handed to teachers with this instruction: "You decide. You make the call". It seems to me that the head teachers to whom I have spoken are unanimous in feeling that it is not a manual to help them but a way for the Department to displace responsibility and put it on the shoulders of hard-pressed senior teachers in our schools. Teachers in one primary school in my constituency in the main town of Newtownards informed me that they had 50.2 hours of educational psychology assessment time available to them this year and asked how they were supposed to divide that up when they probably needed 100 or 150 hours to do the right thing by all their pupils.

My colleague Michael Copeland from East Belfast has mentioned and has now proved that some educational psychologists use a stopwatch in assessing the needs of children with special educational needs and that the stopwatch is turned on and off even for a short telephone conversation. I say this to the House, particularly those who were against the 11-plus transfer system on the grounds that it was the equivalent of child abuse: beware that how we assess special educational need is not the new 11-plus.

I conclude with these overarching remarks about the Programme for Government. Whether it is education, the economy or the health service, let teachers teach, let doctors and nurses tend the sick, and let business people do business. Let them generate wealth, jobs and the tax revenue that will fund excellence in our public services, and — let us not forget — our salaries.

**Mr Doherty (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the First Minister and the deputy First Minister for bringing this debate to the House. I speak today as the Deputy Chair of the Committee for Regional Development and base my comments on the Committee's report 'Response to the Consultation on the Draft Programme for Government 2011-15, the Draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-21 and the Draft Economic Strategy', which was published on 25 January this year. I will restrict my comments to those relating to the motion.

The Programme for Government contains six commitments that fall to the Department for Regional Development. The first commitment is to progress the upgrade of key road projects and improve the overall road network to ensure that journey times on key transport corridors reduce by 2.5% against the 2003 baseline by March 2015. The second

is to ensure that there will be no additional water charges during this Programme for Government period. The third is to upgrade the Coleraine to Derry railway line. The fourth is to invest over £500 million to promote more sustainable modes of travel. The fifth commitment is to create the conditions to facilitate at least 36% of primary-school pupils and 22% of secondary-school pupils to walk or cycle to school as their main mode of transport by 2015. The sixth is to maintain a high quality of drinking water and improve compliance with waste water standards by investing £600 million in water and sewerage infrastructure. With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will briefly address each commitment.

I am delighted that there has been significant progress towards the first target — the progressing of key road projects — following the announcement of £330 million, £105 million and £57 million to the A5, A8 and A2 networks respectively. That will make a major contribution to the economy in the North as a whole and, in the case of the A5, to the north-west in particular. It is estimated that the multiplier ratio is 3:1, meaning a financial injection of nearly £1 billion. Although that is welcomed by all, it is important to note that the target to reduce journey times by 2.5% against the 2003 baseline was deficient in two ways. First, targets exist for the reduction of journey times through the upgrading of key roads while no targets are in place to improve public transport times, where it is claimed that journey times are increasing. Secondly, the reduction of 2.5% was against a 2003 baseline rather than a more recent starting point. That was not seen as significantly challenging to the Department.

The commitment to ensure that no additional water charges would be levied during this Programme for Government period was welcomed by organisations representing the public but caused concern to those charged with delivering and scrutinising the water and waste water targets. These concerns did not necessarily centre on the fact that charges would not be applied but on the governance processes resulting from NI Water being designated a non-departmental public body for accounting purposes. It was argued that that came with constraints that impact on NIW's ability to deliver priority works and maximise efficiencies and performances for customers. In addition, there was a concern that funding did not appear to be adequate, with consequent risks for future levels of service and the potential for EU infraction. Undoubtedly, those are serious concerns, and the Committee will wish to receive the Minister for Regional Development and his officials to commence discussion on the governance arrangements of NIW in the very near future.

The third pledge is to upgrade the Coleraine to Derry railway line. Again, we have seen some early commitments to that upgrade with emergency remedial works being undertaken to ensure that an important section of the track is available for the majority of the City of Culture celebrations. I commend the Minister for Regional Development for his engagement with the Committee in that respect. We hope that the full upgrade can be completed as soon as possible, bringing about further improvements and improved connectivity between the north-west and the remainder of the cities and towns in the North and in the South.

The fourth commitment is to invest over £500 million to promote more sustainable modes of transport. The

Committee heard that there appeared to be a conflict between the sustainable transport objectives in the Programme for Government and those contained in major existing policy documents, such as the regional transport strategy, particularly with regard to the fact that the budget appears to be moving away from the 65:35 funding split between roads and public transport. It was suggested that only approximately 14% to 15% of the budget would now be available for investment in public transport and that the investment of £500 million would be used to maintain passenger numbers at 77 million per annum. That target has been in place since 2008 and was said to be indicative of the fact that the Programme for Government merely sought to maintain the status quo and would not create the environment and circumstances that would bring about a significant modal shift away from cars to public transport.

The fifth commitment seeks, by 2015, to create the conditions to enable at least 36% of primary-school pupils and 22% of secondary-school pupils to walk or cycle to school as their main mode of transport. That is universally welcomed, and the Committee was able to see the potential for such a target when it witnessed pupils at Gilnahirk Primary School take part in the Bike It programme. The one criticism of the target was that it restricted itself to the education sector and did not expand into, for example, the commute to work.

The final target is to maintain a high quality of drinking water and to improve compliance with waste water standards by investing £600 million in the water and sewerage infrastructure. I covered the concerns about the governance of NIW earlier and will not recount them again. However, the levels of funding identified in the Programme for Government and ISNI caused grave concern, as they will drop significantly up to and beyond 2015. Funding is currently at £188 million per annum. However, it will drop to £167 million per annum by 2015 and will drop again to £100 million per annum for the period up to 2021. It was estimated that it costs up to £80 million per annum just to maintain the base asset, and that leaves very little to invest in infrastructure, particularly given the lack of opportunity to carry capital funding over the financial years.

A number of respondents stated that the milestones and outcomes accompanying the commitments were not SMART and were vague and unambitious, which would, therefore, lead to difficulty in assessing progress. Again, it was felt that an opportunity had been lost to use appropriate milestones to drive the Programme for Government commitments, resulting in a tick-box exercise rather than a meaningful analysis of progress. It was seen as a priority that clear, measurable and ambitious targets were needed for each commitment. It was seen as important that the delegation of Executive commitments to individual departmental corporate plans should also result in meaningful, measurable and ambitious targets and outcomes. The Committee for Regional Development —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

**Mr Doherty:** — is due to receive the departmental senior management team on 27 March, and I assure the House that we will seek to ensure that the corporate plan contains meaningful, measurable and ambitious targets.

**Mr A Maginness:** This is a curious piece of political retrofitting. The normal thing is to have a Programme for Government and then a Budget. However, we have done it the other way round, and we are now trying to retrofit a Programme for Government to the Budget. That, of course, is not a satisfactory way to do business. Putting the cart before the horse is certainly not an efficient or effective way of conducting our affairs in the Assembly or the Executive.

Ten months after the election, we have a Programme for Government. Surely, that is a serious criticism of the Executive.

## 2.00 pm

That having been said, however, my party welcomes the fact that a Programme for Government has now, finally, been produced and is subject to scrutiny and debate. One could not object to many parts of the programme; in fact, one would support them. It is a motherhood-and-apple-pie approach to government and government programming. One cannot object to much of the document's details, and my party broadly agrees with its five priorities. However, we are, rightly, concerned about the lack of detail that is provided on each of those five priorities, the vagueness of many of the key commitments in each priority area and the lack of measurable targets in the document.

That has been reflected throughout the debate by other Members. Mr Frew said that agriculture targets are not challenging enough; Mr Nesbitt said that there are no real targets on education policy; and Mr Mervyn Storey, who also spoke from an education perspective, said that there is a lack of measurable targets in that Department's area of competence.

One could look throughout the document and see a lack of measurable targeting. If there is to be a Programme for Government, it needs to have measurable targets. One must be able to say that because one is approaching a particular point in time, one will, therefore, have achieved a particular target. That is remarkably absent throughout the document.

Other issues are absent from the document that should be contained in it, such as mortgage relief; there is no commitment to a mortgage relief scheme. Indeed, recently, the Social Development Minister, Nelson McCausland, announced officially that there would be no mortgage relief scheme. Unlike his unofficial announcement on travel passes for over-60s, that was an official announcement.

**Ms Ritchie:** Does the Member agree that the position of the current Minister for Social Development contrasts with that of his predecessors, who gave a commitment to provide for a mortgage relief scheme?

**Mr A Maginness:** Indeed, I am grateful for that timely reminder. The previous Minister gave that commitment. I assumed that there was consensus in the House in favour of it. I am not certain whether the Minister has gone on a solo run again. Perhaps, the deputy First Minister or, indeed, the First Minister can advise us on that.

On welfare reform — one of the most far-reaching policies to affect Northern Ireland and the Executive — there is an absence of any plan to counteract the serious impact of those reforms in Northern Ireland, and there is faint-hearted opposition from the Executive to those so-called reforms, which have been imposed on us by the Conservative

Government at Westminster. There is no planning, and no account has been taken in the Programme for Government to deal with the adverse impact of welfare reform.

Again, with regard to social development, there is a commitment to provide 8,000 houses over the next three years. If one looks at that, however, one sees that it does not mean 8,000 newbuilds. It means, perhaps, 5,500 or almost 6,000 newbuilds. The rest will be affordable housing.

Affordable housing is welcome and one cannot object to it but it should be separate from newbuild social housing. Newbuild programmes have a huge multiplier effect on the overall economy, and it is through such programmes that we will stimulate our economy. However, they are absent from this document, and we are not maximising the potential that we have in that area.

There is a passing reference to and commitments to renewable energy, and those are also to be welcomed. However, you do not sense that the Executive are taking up the challenge on renewable energy or that they really understand the massive potential that it presents to the Northern Ireland economy.

The green new deal has disappeared below the floorboards. Where has it gone? Is there any serious commitment on the part of the Executive to the green new deal? The green new deal could transform our energy consumption and create a situation in which private and public housing can become more energy efficient and save our owner-occupiers and tenants an endless amount of money. Fuel efficiency is the one instrument that we have to counteract fuel poverty in Northern Ireland, yet it is absent from the Programme for Government.

There are vague aspirations in the document, but no tight targets or direction have been given. For example, there is nothing in the document that takes account of the expanding needs of older people in this community. Those needs are expanding year by year, and no sector has a greater need than our older people. There is also nothing of any substance in the document for victims of the past or for victims of crime. There is very little by way of a serious impact on the whole area of victims.

We can also look for a reference to the European dimension. There is a mention of that dimension, but it is vestigial and non-substantive, and there is no real engagement with the European institutions or any attempt to energise our politics to make them Euro-friendly. However, that is hardly surprising, given that the parties of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister are antipathetic to Europe. You cannot be surprised by the lack of a vigorous pro-European approach from those parties.

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

**Mr A Maginness:** No, I am nearly finished.

Where is the North/South dimension in the Programme for Government? There is no serious expansion of the North/South — *[Interruption.]* I hear that Members on the DUP Benches agree with that, but there must be progress on that.

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

**Mr A Maginness:** There is enormous economic potential to be gained from us working together, North and South. We must work hard to develop that dimension.

**Mr Irwin (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure):** The Committee first considered this matter on 15 December 2011, when it received correspondence from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister asking for the views of the Statutory Committees on the draft Programme for Government and draft investment strategy for Northern Ireland.

Recognising its importance, and in anticipation of receiving that correspondence, the Committee had agreed to write to all the DCAL arm's-length bodies to seek their views, particularly about whether they felt that any gaps existed, and for their comments on milestones and outputs and on how best to monitor progress.

The Committee received and considered responses from six arm's-length bodies: the Arts Council of Northern Ireland; Foras na Gaeilge; Libraries NI; NI Screen; the Northern Ireland Museums Council; and Sport NI. It also took views from DCAL officials, focusing in particular on the Department's commitments in the strategy and its delivery vehicles. The Committee noted with some concern that DCAL is responsible for the delivery of only three of the 82 commitments in the Programme for Government: namely, to support 200 projects through the creative industries innovation fund; to develop sports stadiums as agreed with the IFA, the GAA and Ulster Rugby; and to host the World Police and Fire Games in 2013. Although they appear significant, those three commitments form less than 4% of the Executive's targets and are, in most cases, already well advanced. Although the Committee in no way underestimates the huge task that now faces the Department to successfully complete the implementation of the projects and notes the significant contribution that they can make to the Northern Ireland economy if success is achieved, it questions whether the three given commitments are sufficiently challenging for the Department over the 2011-15 period.

Looking beyond individual departmental issues, the Committee acknowledges that the main priority in the Programme for Government is to build a strong and vibrant economy and recognises the potential economic benefits of each of the given commitments. As I have already mentioned, the first priority set aside for DCAL relates to the creative industries. It is well documented and widely accepted that that sector has the potential to make significant economic and social contributions to society. However, in order that its capacity for job and wealth creation is maximised, it is essential that the correct supporting mechanisms are in place. Those mechanisms will need to ensure that conditions are right to stimulate industry growth and to maximise and harness economic benefits.

The Committee's ongoing inquiry into maximising the potential of the creative industries is well placed to examine the policies, strategies and frameworks that oversee the development and growth of the creative industries and to determine whether they are effective and fit for purpose. The Committee recognises that the creative industries innovation fund (CIIF) is one such mechanism that supports the growth of our creative industries. Therefore, it welcomes

the Programme for Government pledge for the continued support of 200 projects through the fund.

However, it is noted that the current fund allocation shows a 40% reduction over the previous one, with an allocation of just £4 million over four years as opposed to £5 million over three years in the previous fund. The resources pledged for the purpose are critical to the ongoing expansion of the creative industries, and the allocation is, perhaps, not truly indicative of the value of the fund in maximising the tangible economic benefits and growth in turnover among CIIF-assisted companies.

The Committee also acknowledges the contribution that the three sports stadia and the World Police and Fire Games will make to the economy. The stadia have the potential to attract increased revenue streams from spectators and the opportunity to create immediate benefits for the construction sector. Those projected benefits are, of course, in addition to the estimated £15.5 million that will be attracted from hosting the World Police and Fire Games. In the wider sporting arena, I want to acknowledge the addition of the target to support the successful hosting of the 2012 Irish Open and to secure a further international golf event. That will, undoubtedly, benefit the economy and boost our tourism numbers.

Although we are pleased to note the Executive's intention to have a more focused and structured approach to the Programme for Government's commitments and, as I have outlined, recognise the impact that the DCAL commitments will have, we are not convinced that they fully reflect the Department's contribution to all five strategic priorities.

## 2.15 pm

Some of the gaps that were identified when reflecting DCAL's contribution include sports and museums. The question was raised of whether museums generally receive significant recognition. That is indeed a salient point. A review that the previous Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure carried out found that the museums sector contributes £16 million to the economy and accounts for the top four tourist attractions in Northern Ireland. It is encouraging to see that the target for tourism in the final PFG has increased from having 3.6 million visitors to having 4.2 million, with an increase in revenue of a further £51 million. However, it is disappointing that the contribution of the museums sector to cultural tourism, particularly in view of the number of commemoration events that the museums sector will host this year, is not adequately reflected in the Programme for Government.

On sport, it was noted that the PFG fails to appropriately recognise the significant contribution of DCAL's Sport Matters strategy, which addresses all, not just one, of the PFG's priorities. In addition, other gaps were noted in grassroots sport, physical recreation, film, attendance at arts events, angling and the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. Those were of particular concern, as that position appeared to be at odds with the previous PFG commitments. As the World Police and Fire Games and the three stadiums will be in Belfast, concerns were also raised that the Department's commitments through the PFG were largely Belfast-centric. The Committee suggested that the Department will wish to satisfy itself that those commitments are equitable and benefit all of Northern Ireland.



With 85% of the Department's work delivered through its arm's-length bodies, some issues were raised about accountability and the delivery of the projects. As an example, CIIF is administered by the Arts Council in association with the Digital Circle and NI Screen, but delivery of the World Police and Fire Games is the responsibility of World Police and Fire Games 2013, and the three sports stadiums will be delivered by the IFA, GAA and Ulster Rugby. Responsibility and accountability for the delivery of each project lies with those bodies, while DCAL has overall responsibility for ensuring that appropriate systems, processes, policies and funding are in place. The Committee noted that DCAL must put in place the appropriate support and set targets and milestones for the delivery of those projects in line with SMART — specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound — objectives and retain a robust oversight role. There must also be accountability at departmental level.

**The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Ms S Ramsey):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to address the House as Chair of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Like other Members, I welcome the publication of the Programme for Government today.

The Committee took evidence on the draft Programme for Government from officials on 14 December 2011. One of our concerns at the time was that of the 76 key commitments, only five related to the Department of Health, yet, across all Departments, the Department spends over 40% of the total resource budget. I note that in the Programme for Government published today, there are now six targets for health. That increase is welcome, but there are still relatively few targets for a Department that is the size of the Health Department and that is responsible for the amount of money that it spends.

One of the Department's commitments in the Programme for Government is to reconfigure and reform health and social care services. We know that that will be driven by the review of health and social care, which was published on 13 December 2011. When the Committee considered the draft Programme for Government, we were concerned that there did not seem to be a clear link between the Programme for Government and the recommendations coming out of the review. In particular, we could not see any evidence that the Programme for Government would be used to monitor or measure the changes that are proposed in the review.

However, I am pleased to see that in the revised Programme for Government, which has been published today, there is clear reference to the review of health and social care. In year 1, there is now a target to develop population plans to deliver a new model of care, as set out in the review. In year 2, there is a target to reduce the number of unnecessary days that patients stay in acute hospitals. In year 3, there is a target to secure a shift from hospital to community services, along with a shift in funding in line with the recommendations in the review. It is important that the review, given its impact on the future of health and social care, is placed firmly in the context of the Programme for Government.

The targets on allocating an increasing percentage of the overall health budget to public health have been changed. In the draft document, there were simply references to the

additional amount of money to be invested each year, but we now have a target for year 1 of setting new policy directions to strengthen cross-departmental working. For year 2, there is a target to extend bowel screening to everyone aged 60 to 74, and in year 3, the target is simply to spend £10 million more on public health compared with in 2011-12. The Committee had asked that the targets should quote the increase in percentage terms as well as cash terms. Unfortunately, that has not been done, so we do not know whether £10 million extra on public health is a 1% rise or a 10% rise on what we are currently spending.

Under the priority of protecting our people, the environment and creating safer communities, there is a commitment, which was not in the draft Programme for Government, for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to improve safeguarding for children and vulnerable adults. That is a very welcome addition to the Programme for Government. Sometimes, the social care aspect of the Department can be overlooked, and we get too focused on health and hospitals. So, it is good to see that target included.

The Department is aiming to produce a joint strategy to address domestic and sexual violence and abuse in year 1. That will be an important step forward, and the Committee wrote to the Minister about that issue just a few weeks ago. There is also a target to develop an interdepartmental child safeguarding policy framework. The Safeguarding Board is due to be established in June and, hopefully, it will be involved in that work.

Under the priority for delivering high-quality public service, there is a new target of rolling out the family nurse partnership programme to a further test site. That programme is all about early intervention and support for young parents and children, and it is welcome as the Committee is firmly in favour of prevention and supporting people so that they do not end up needing services or end up in crisis further down the line.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Committee, I welcome the publication of the Programme for Government, and I assure the House that we will work closely with the Departments to ensure that they meet their targets.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Members, we have to interrupt this debate for Question Time. I ask you to take your ease for a few moments until we commence at 2.30 pm.

*The debate stood suspended.*

2.30 pm

## Oral Answers to Questions

### Social Development

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Questions 1, 5, 11 and 13 have been withdrawn and require written answer.

#### Benefits

2. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the benefits to which the annual expenditure of £300 million that is under the control of the Executive is allocated. (AQO 1504/11-15)

**Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):** The £300 million that is referred to is the current total estimated expenditure on rates relief, which is approximately £130 million; the main passported benefits, which total approximately £140 million; and the discretionary elements of the social fund, which total approximately £30 million. The Executive administer all non-social-security benefits, which are commonly referred to as passported benefits. The range of passported benefits is extensive, and payment is generally predicated on the claimant being in receipt of a social security benefit. There are approximately 30 passported benefits, including legal aid, free school meals, free health service dental treatment, disabled facilities grants, and numerous other benefits.

In addition, from April 2013, the Executive will resume responsibility for the replacement scheme for the discretionary social fund and for the rates element of housing benefit. Although discussions are ongoing between the Department of Finance and Personnel and Her Majesty's Treasury, there are planned reductions of at least 10% in the funding for discretionary funding and rates relief from the 2013 and 2014 financial years. I will discuss passported benefits with Lord Freud when I meet him in London tomorrow.

**Mr McCallister:** I thank the Minister for his response. Will he confirm that free travel for the over-60s is a matter for the Minister for Regional Development? Therefore, will he detail what discussions he had with the Minister for Regional Development before he made his public remarks on 29 February?

**Mr McCausland:** Free transport for senior citizens was introduced by a DUP Minister.

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr McCausland:** It was introduced by my colleague who is sitting beside me. It remains the policy of the party that it should be retained. It is a policy with which I agree. It is a policy that I support. It is unfortunate that some comments were misconstrued, but I state categorically that I have never advocated that it be changed. I confirm that it is a matter for the Minister for Regional Development, and I am sure that he will do the right thing and retain the free transport.

**Mr I McCrea:** The Minister stated that the Executive will be responsible for the replacement scheme for the

discretionary elements of the social fund. Will he give the House more detail on what the plans are?

**Mr McCausland:** The Department has carried out significant research to consider how we can replace the current scheme. The first phase of that work has been completed, and I will receive recommendations on the way forward in the near future. I will then bring a paper to the Executive for consideration.

**Mr McGlone:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister confirm that all Social Security Agency staff positions, particularly those that provide front line services for many of the people who face the worst ravages of welfare reform, including the transition from incapacity benefit to employment and support allowance (ESA), will be maintained at their current level of deployment?

**Mr McCausland:** There will, undoubtedly, be changes in the delivery of services over the next while in a number of ways. First, the Member will be well aware of the process of trying to bring together jobs and benefits in single offices. In addition, there is the fact that we in Northern Ireland provide services for a number of regions of Great Britain. It is important that we do all that we can to ensure that those jobs are retained in Northern Ireland because it is a very substantial number of jobs and it is a major boost to the local economy that the contracts for those regions of Great Britain have been secured by our staff here in Northern Ireland. So, it is important that we have a robust and efficient service in Northern Ireland for our staff and those whom we serve across the water.

#### Welfare Reform Legislation

3. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the flexibilities that exist for Northern Ireland within the confines of parity. (AQO 1505/11-15)

9. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State following his recent remarks regarding the substantial degree of flexibility that exists within the confines of parity. (AQO 1511/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** With the Deputy Speaker's permission, I will answer questions 3 and 9 together, as both ask about flexibilities within the confines of parity.

I and my Executive colleagues on the subcommittee on welfare reform recently started to explore a range of flexibilities that we believe may exist within the confines of parity. That important work is at an early stage. We are trying to focus on maximising all available flexibilities to help to mitigate the negative impacts of the Welfare Reform Bill. I also had a constructive meeting with the Secretary of State, at which we discussed how we can work together on welfare reform, including exploring possible areas for flexibility. I have had, and will continue to have, regular contact with not only the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland but Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Ministers. As I mentioned, I will be in London tomorrow to meet David Freud and Iain Duncan Smith.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I thank the Minister for his reply. Does he acknowledge that due to the 40-year conflict that we had, a higher incidence of people here are on disability benefits,

particularly due to mental health-related matters, and a special case must be made? Will he assure the House that he will take that message, loud and clear, to his meeting with Freud?

**Mr McCausland:** I assure the Member that the point will be raised tomorrow; it is one that we have raised on quite a number of occasions. It is clear that there is a difference between the profiles of disability living allowance benefit in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. More people are on that benefit here as a result of mental health issues than in Great Britain. That is something that we need to look at. I am sure that the reasons for it are varied, but I have no doubt that the impact and legacy of the Troubles contribute to that. That is very much in our thinking, and they are aware of that difference, as we move forward.

**Mr Copeland:** I, too, thank the Minister for his answers. Is he aware of any previous breaches or tests of parity that have not resulted in a fiscal penalty?

**Mr McCausland:** There are areas in which flexibility is possible. They seem to be around, basically, operational issues, on which the focus is at present. The Member, rightly, recognises the fundamental principle of parity, but we know that, within that, there is the opportunity for some flexibility in areas such as operational issues. At present, the Executive's all-party subcommittee is looking at all the possible areas in which there may be a desire for flexibility. We are already negotiating and will continue to negotiate with Westminster in regard to those issues. So, for the moment, the focus is on identifying the possible areas.

**Mr A Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The British Government have allocated in the region of £100 million to bring back into use empty homes in north-east England and £1 billion to supplement the work contract to get young people into employment. In respect of that, has there been any consequential benefit to the Executive here?

**Mr McCausland:** I assume that the Member is referring to the announcement in the media this morning by the coalition Government's Housing Minister, Grant Shapps, of an increase in the maximum discounts that social housing tenants in England will be able to receive if they exercise their right to buy their home. A number of issues were announced this morning, and we will certainly look at what the implications may be for here. I assume that this is not something that has implications across the United Kingdom; the announcement was specifically in regard to England. We have responsibility for such matters in Northern Ireland, but if there are lessons to be learned, we can certainly look at them. However, as the Member would be aware, we received the information only this morning.

**Mr Campbell:** The Minister indicated that he would have further meetings with DWP officials and Ministers in the near future. When he does so, will he reassure the House that, operating within the flexibility arrangements that he would like to get and that parity brings, he will try to ensure that DWP spells out the cost that a breach of parity would bring to people in Northern Ireland, particularly to those who are in receipt of benefits? I mean the cost that that would bring to such people through less in benefits being paid to them.

**Mr McCausland:** The Member makes an important point in spelling out clearly the detrimental implications for people in

Northern Ireland if there were to be a breach of parity. That point has now been made by a range of stakeholders, and there is a growing recognition that some of the suggestions made by some folk earlier about rampant running ahead and just breaking parity here, there and yonder are simply untenable. There is a genuine recognition across the board that we cannot afford to do that. I will certainly continue to get some clarity around the financial implications so that people are well aware of them, if there are any doubts that remain.

## Business Improvement Districts

4. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister for Social Development what towns in the Newry and Armagh constituency will benefit from the business improvement district proposals. (AQO 1506/11-15)

15. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the legislation to introduce business improvement districts. (AQO 1517/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 4 and 15 together as they are both about business improvement districts (BIDs).

All towns and cities in Northern Ireland can benefit from my proposals for business improvement districts if they wish to do so. The legislation will be flexible enough to allow local discretion and for the development of local solutions. The onus is, however, completely on local businesses, along with their local council, to decide whether a BID is something that they wish to take forward.

BIDs will potentially have a significant impact as they will hand a measure of control to businesses themselves. In a defined local area, businesses will be able to prioritise the work that needs to be done to make their area more appealing, put together a costed bid for that work and vote on whether it should be implemented. It will bring businesses together and give them a vested interest in identifying, costing and delivering improvements that they agree are needed in their local area, with a view to increasing footfall and, thereby, consumer spending in their businesses.

Subject to Executive agreement, I intend to introduce a business improvement districts Bill to the Assembly before the summer recess, and subject to its speed of passage through the Assembly, I hope that the Bill will receive Royal Assent by the end of the year. It will be followed next year by the necessary subordinate legislation and guidance from the Department with the aim of having the statutory framework in place by summer 2013.

**Mr Irwin:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Could it not be argued that a period of recession is not an appropriate time to be developing a BID?

**Mr McCausland:** On the contrary, this is a good time to develop a business improvement district. It provides an opportunity for businesses to work together to drive down overheads. A BID can make their money go that much further, with larger marketing budgets that can reach out and promote their businesses to more people, both locally and further afield. A BID offers great opportunities for economies of scale.

**Miss M McIlveen:** I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will he explain why it has taken so long to put this legislation in place?

**Mr McCausland:** I took up office in May 2011 and one of my first actions was to review the outcome of the public consultation and decide on the way forward. That involved finalising the policy, briefing the Social Development Committee and seeking Executive agreement to draft the necessary legislation. That drafting is now under way, and I plan to have the primary legislation in place by the end of this year. That will be followed by secondary legislation and guidance from the Department. So, we have been taking this forward as a priority as quickly as possible.

**Mr Brady:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister explain what the benefits of business improvement areas are if no new resources are made available to help businesses grow?

**2.45 pm**

**Mr McCausland:** An important point to make at the start of my response is that there is a desire and hunger among the business community in many towns for the introduction of that legislation. Not long ago, I was up with council officials and traders in Ballymena. They have talked about it being brought forward. If you can get the people in Ballymena to spend extra money, obviously that is a good thing. I have been elsewhere to talk to traders and councils, and there is a consensus that it is a good thing. Some areas are more prepared for it than others. Some are just starting out on the journey and others are well advanced. Ballymena is a good example of local initiative: businesses have been moving forward rapidly on this to prepare themselves, as have traders in Belfast. There are advantages, and they are recognised by the traders.

It is not about extra money from government; we are not putting the money in. However, it gives control to local traders on how any additional money that they put into an area will be spent. It is about that sense of local control and the knowledge that local businesses have on what will do the most to improve trade for them.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. What actions will the Minister's Department take to encourage businesses and chambers of commerce, for example in Newry, Keady, Crossmaglen, Armagh and Markethill, to participate in that scheme?

**Mr McCausland:** I think that, already, right across Northern Ireland, the business community is recognising the value and benefits of the scheme, and that is without it being promoted and sold by the Department. Ours is very much an enabling role, and there is no better way to encourage another town or area to take that up than to see it working and to see the enthusiasm in other areas. Traders speaking to one another is one of the most effective ways to promote this. The general view that I get is that we do not need to drum up enthusiasm; it is already there.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question 5 has been withdrawn.

## Social Housing: South Down

**6. Ms Ruane** asked the Minister for Social Development how many social housing units are currently vacant in the South Down constituency. (AQO 1508/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** There are only 29 long-term vacant Housing Executive homes within the Downpatrick, Banbridge and Newry district office areas. Those are vacant, pending further repair, to be used as temporary housing, and some are scheduled for demolition. However, empty housing is a waste of a valuable resource and can blight communities and attract antisocial behaviour. I have seen that all too often in my constituency, so it is a problem of which I am well aware.

In the coming weeks, I will bring forward a new housing strategy, which will include plans on how we will make better use of our existing stock. However, we also need to see what more we can do to make better use of empty homes in the private sector. Some time ago, the Housing Executive undertook research that estimated that there could be up to 40,000 empty homes across Northern Ireland. However, the data underpinning that estimate was not reliable, and despite some initial progress to track down the owners of empty homes, the exercise petered out and results were disappointing. I have asked for a more robust action plan to tackle the wider issue to be produced, and new work in two specific pilot areas is under way to inform that new plan. I see that as an important way to address housing need.

**Ms Ruane:** Go raibh maith agat, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Given the dire need for social housing in the South Down area, however, how long do those people have to wait before they get what they deserve?

**Mr McCausland:** The issue of housing need is recognised right across Northern Ireland and in every constituency. I am sure that the Member will be aware that in the Programme for Government, we identified a target of 8,000 social and affordable homes in the CSR period.

**Mrs McKevitt:** What is the current level of housing stress in the Newry and Mourne area, particularly in Warrenpoint and Rostrevor, and what action is being taken to address it?

**Mr McCausland:** I am sure that the Member will recognise that although I have a good memory, it is not good enough to enable me to quote the exact figures for each council area off the top of my head. I will supply the figures to the Member in writing.

The Housing Executive will set out how we are addressing the need in the social housing development programme. We are in the latter part of the year, and I am disappointed at the tardiness of the Housing Executive in bringing that plan to me.

**Mr Swann:** I thank the Minister very much for his answer. He pre-empted me as regards the social housing development plan 2012-15. We are already three months into 2012 and we have not seen it. How does that tie in with his current Programme for Government targets for social housing? Is there a match between them?

**Mr McCausland:** I think that the Member will have picked up on the final point in my answer to the previous supplementary question. I would like to see the social

housing programme coming forward to me several months, rather than a matter of weeks, before the end of the year. It is an unsatisfactory situation. However, I do not see that that will necessarily affect our Programme for Government target. Our target is there, and we are going for it.

**Ms Lewis:** Has the Minister's Department had any success in bringing empty homes back into use?

**Mr McCausland:** At the same time as developing an empty homes action plan for the wider private sector, I have initiated a number of pilot approaches to addressing some of the more difficult empty homes issues in the social housing sector. One thing that we have done is to identify some 100 existing homes that were long-term voids in Antrim, Ballymena, Downpatrick, Enniskillen and lower Oldpark in Belfast, and work has already begun to bring them back into use. I anticipate that this area of work will be ramped up considerably over the next couple of years.

### Energy Saving Trust: Funding

7. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the removal of funding for the Energy Saving Trust by the British Government and the impact that this might have on the uptake of energy efficiency grant schemes. (AQO 1509/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** My Department was notified in spring 2011 of the Department of Energy and Climate Change's intention to procure for a wider range of energy efficiency advice services. My officials have been in discussion with the Department of Energy and Climate Change to ensure that any new energy saving advice service meets the needs of householders in Northern Ireland, and this has been factored into the Department of Energy and Climate Change's procurement documents.

I understand that the current service may be replaced by a smaller and more focused Department of Energy and Climate Change energy saving advice service, which will include GB's green deal. My understanding is that the Energy Saving Trust (EST) is involved in the tender process with the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

Energy advice is available from a range of other sources, including the warm homes scheme. All persons who make contact with the scheme, whether eligible for measures or not, can receive energy efficiency advice.

Despite the withdrawal of Energy Saving Trust funding and the existing Freephone number, Bryson Energy will continue to provide a free impartial energy advice centre telephone and outreach service for householders in Northern Ireland. Bryson Energy will be launching a new Freephone contact telephone number for the service in April 2012. My Department, through the Housing Executive, is continuing to provide funding of £95,000 to Bryson Energy to ensure that householders in Northern Ireland will continue to have access to free and impartial energy efficiency advice.

In 2011-12, the Energy Saving Trust provided £350,000 to Bryson Energy for the provision of energy advice. Bryson Energy is considering the impact of the withdrawal of EST funding on its organisation.

**Mr Flanagan:** I thank the Minister for his extensive answer and for all the detail that he gave. I visited Fermanagh

House on Friday to see the service being provided by Bryson Energy, and there was somebody over on behalf of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) who was trying to save some jobs there.

I want to ask the Minister specifically about the green deal that has been implemented in England and the fact that it will not apply here. Surely something has to be done to ensure that the service that has been provided to date can continue. With a deficit of about £200,000 in funding, there is no way that the same service can be provided.

**Mr McCausland:** Despite the withdrawal of EST funding and the existing Freephone number, Bryson Energy will continue to provide that free, impartial energy advice centre telephone and outreach service for Northern Ireland. I said that it will launch a new Freephone contact number in April and that my Department, through the Housing Executive, is funding Bryson Energy, thus ensuring that the service continues.

In 2011-12, the Energy Saving Trust provided us with £350,000. Bryson Energy is considering the impact of the withdrawal of EST funding on its service, and consideration of that is ongoing.

**Mr Kinahan:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree with the coalition Government's previous statements that energy efficiency measures are the cheapest way of tackling energy issues and climate change?

**Mr McCausland:** Energy efficiency is extremely important. One of our priorities in Northern Ireland is fuel poverty, and energy inefficiency is undoubtedly one of the three contributing factors to that. That is why we are now investing so much in energy efficiency insulation measures and double glazing in Housing Executive properties. There are other plans to continue, in some form or other, a scheme such as that which we had with the warm homes and boiler replacement schemes. So, we have had a real focus on energy efficiency, and that will continue. It has to be a priority, and it makes sense.

**Mr A Maginness:** I thank the Minister for his previous answers. Where information on energy to consumers is concerned, it is essential that there is an independent advice service. Is the Minister really satisfied at the current situation? I know that Bryson does a very good job, but could that service not be expanded, thus providing people with an independent service upon which they can rely?

**Mr McCausland:** I am sure that the Member in no way wants to denigrate or play down the service that Bryson provides, and I know that he is not intending to do that at all. It is very important that that service continues. As to the extent of energy advice provision, I have said that considerations are being given to what happens in the future, and that remains the situation. In fact, we are still considering the matter, as, in fact, is Bryson Energy.

### Girdwood Barracks, Belfast

8. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Social Development whether there will be sports facilities for use by local schools at the Girdwood Barracks site, Belfast. (AQO 1510/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** My Department is reviewing the implementation of the draft master plan for the Girdwood site and the former Crumlin Road jail. Following consultation

with OFMDFM and other stakeholders, I aim to announce the way forward as soon as possible. As part of the implementation review, my Department is considering all the uses for the site that were proposed in the draft master plan, including the provision of a sports facility for use by local schools.

I am aware that three north Belfast schools — Belfast Royal Academy, St Malachy's College and St Patrick's — are interested in the development of shared sporting facilities on the Girdwood site, and my Department is engaging with the schools to determine their requirements so that the feasibility of the proposal can be fully considered in the context of all uses for the site.

The development of Girdwood, including any sports facilities, is subject to obtaining the necessary business case, statutory planning and funding approvals.

**Ms Lo:** I thank the Member for his response, and I am really pleased by it. Can he assure me that when he is progressing the development, the three schools are consulted all the way through and that their needs and desires for shared facilities are taken into account?

**Mr McCausland:** I know that the Member met at least one of the schools recently. There had been a number of conversations with political parties. I assure the Member that this has been on our agenda for quite some time. I met one of the schools that took a particular interest in the issue, and it features very much in our thinking. I am very sympathetic to this, and it seems to be something on which we will get widespread community support.

3.00 pm

## Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

### European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations

1. **Mr Humphrey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the marking of 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. (AQO 1518/11-15)

**Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister):** Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Anderson to answer the question.

**Ms M Anderson (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We will mark the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations by bringing forward a range of measures, including the possibility of a small grants scheme, proposals for legislation to help to tackle age discrimination and a revised older people's strategy. That will improve older people's quality of life and help to tackle the inequalities that they face.

In May, we will consult on our revised older people's strategy, and, in the autumn, we will consult on the legislation to outlaw discrimination on the ground of age in the provisions of goods, facilities and services. We will take account of the

views of the Commissioner for Older People and the Older People's Advisory Panel in developing our proposals, and our consultation will be specifically designed to facilitate older people's participation. The Member was on the OFMDFM Committee when we consulted with older people on the establishment of a commissioner. They are a very active lobby group.

As I mentioned, we are considering the establishment of a small grants scheme for protection to promote active ageing and solidarity between generations. To promote solidarity between generations, we will look across our children and our older people's responsibility to promote opportunities for people of different generations to learn together and to share experiences. Of course, the views of the Equality Commission, the Commissioner for Older People, the Older People's Advisory Panel, the Children's Commissioner and the third sector will be taken into account in developing a programme of events that will showcase the principles of the year, including an event to mark older people's day in October.

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the junior Minister for her answer. The junior Minister is right: there is a very effective lobby from older persons in our community. I work closely with the greater Shankill and north Belfast groups. Does the junior Minister agree that the work done by churches and faith-based organisations across Northern Ireland is invaluable in getting young people and senior citizens together, in bridging that age gap and in building the shared future we want for all people in Northern Ireland?

**Ms M Anderson:** A number of groups and organisations, including the two that you referred to, are very active, particularly around the revised older people's strategy and the development of the UN principles for older people. I am aware that you work closely with such groups, so you will know that they relate to independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity. All that is drafted to reflect our society. Society will improve, and, without doubt, the strategy will improve life for older people here, with the involvement of all the people who advocate on their behalf, older people themselves and those who care for them.

**Ms Ruane:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sí dúinn. I thank the junior Minister for her answers this far. Will she give an assurance that, if we extend legislation to end discrimination on the basis of age to goods, facilities and services, the current differential treatment, which is beneficial, will not be lost?

**Ms M Anderson:** That is a very important question. In extending the legislation, we aim to end discrimination on the basis of age or perceived age, which is unjustifiable and, therefore, unfair. We do not intend to end differential treatments that are beneficial and can be objectively justified, such as concessionary fares for older people and for younger people. We will think very carefully about the scope for and the content of exceptions to anti-discrimination measures in our legislation to make sure that we do not overlook any beneficial practices that should continue. We will subject our proposals to full public consultation that includes older people, older people's representatives and people who care for older people.

**Mr Eastwood:** Does the junior Minister support the recent kite-flying by the Minister for Social Development around the potential removal of the free travel scheme for pensioners?

**Ms M Anderson:** The Executive have already put out a position with regard to whether that would be removed or not. Jonathan Bell, the other junior Minister, and I work closely with the older people's sector. We have been engaging with the sector on a number of matters. One of the events that we attended was a dinner at which we found that people, particularly those in the higher echelons of society and on very high wages, said that they would like to make a contribution. However, I think that the Executive have been very clear that such concessions should be given to older people and will not be removed.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I should have advised Members earlier that question 9 and question 11 have been withdrawn and require a written answer.

### Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report

2. **Mr Lyttle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the Northern Ireland peace monitoring report. (AQO 1519/11-15)

**Mr M McGuinness:** We have already come a long way as a society. The collective effort at a political, community and individual level must be commended. The report highlights the stability of the political institutions and the decrease in violence. We are heartened by that finding and the indication that a new, confident urban culture has developed. We will want to see that enhanced as our community continues to move forward. However, we know that there is still work to do. The publication of this report underlines where there continue to be challenges for us as a society. We are committed to addressing the issues, regardless of how complex or challenging they may be.

The First Minister and I remain committed to building a united and shared society. For us to achieve that vision, we must address the division that continues to mar many areas in our community, tackle the segregation that has enabled our people to live often separate lives for too long and encourage and nurture an environment in which cultural diversity is celebrated and embraced. We believe that the finalised cohesion, sharing and integration strategy will be an important building block for tackling those issues. This report will be a valuable reference for the continued considerations of the cross-party working group.

**Mr Lyttle:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his response. The report shows that a possible 90% segregation in schools and housing continues to exist. How does that reflect on his Department's ability, to date, to deliver a united community? What specific actions does he think are needed in the CSI strategy to deliver more integrated schools and neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland?

**Mr M McGuinness:** The cross-party working group on this issue has met weekly since, I think, September of last year. That is important work. It is clear from the reports that the First Minister and I regularly receive that progress has been made. All the issues are being tackled in a serious way. We want to see the conclusion of those deliberations. The CSI working group is dealing comprehensively with all the issues that have been neuralgic for us in recent times.

The First Minister and I have made it absolutely clear that we consider the further development of the working group established under the tutelage of the Minister of Education, John O'Dowd, to be very important in tackling the issue of how we can intensify sharing in education. One project that he and I are keen to see delivered is the development of the Lisanelly and St Lucia project in Omagh in County Tyrone. That is a very important flagship project for us as an Executive. There are real opportunities to show everybody in the education system in particular that the whole issue of sharing is very important for quite a number of reasons, not least economic reasons and the need to ensure that our young people communicate with each other on the basis of respect. That is one example of how we can go forward. There are many other examples, but obviously we want to see the outworking of the report from the working group, and the Member who has just spoken is a member of that group. The sooner that work is completed, the better, and the sooner we can —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Minister's time is up.

**Mr M McGuinness:** — start to tackle those very difficult issues.

**Mr Campbell:** The deputy First Minister will be aware of the 10 key points in the report, two of which are linked. One refers to a strategy for reconciliation and one to a solution to deal with the past. Given that those two things are key to the future, does he agree that the next time he or anyone else who was involved in terror or violence in the past is asked to own up to their part in it, they should do that, rather than plead the fifth amendment, as he did during the Saville inquiry?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Minister may or may not wish to answer that question.

**Mr M McGuinness:** I will answer the question. Obviously, it has been the policy of the Member who asked the question to be as negative as he can, and that is something that I have come to terms with. It says more about him than about me. I have been very much involved in the work of peace and reconciliation. I would like to think that I have put my life on the line for the peace process over recent times on quite a number of occasions and would do so again tomorrow without any hesitation whatsoever. I work very positively and constructively with the First Minister and with many other people in society, including the community and voluntary sector. I also work with all the Churches to ensure that we continue to move forward. The past has been a very dark place for us all, and no solution has yet been found by anybody, not least the Member, to deal with that situation. However, I am very focused on the future and how I can contribute to building a better future for our young people.

**Mr W Clarke:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The report concludes that we are still a very divided society. How effective has community relations funding been over the past 20 years in tackling division?

**Mr M McGuinness:** I well understand the Member's point, and we will look into that question further. Obviously, we need an audit of the effectiveness of community relations funding, given the conclusions of the report. In my view, the report asks some fundamental questions about how government uses resources to deliver for our communities. It is clear that we need to do things differently to achieve better outcomes for our communities. We cannot sustain a

situation where public money is not making an impact where it is needed most. Community relations funding should deliver in a way that is measurable and likely to achieve an outcome that benefits us all. That is clearly not the case, it seems, at present. Those who currently deliver community relations work on behalf of government need to ask themselves whether the current models are the best fit for our society. The CSI working group will look at the delivery of community relations funding during discussions on that programme.

### Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

3. **Mr McMullan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration, including the expected date of completion. (AQO 1520/11-15)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The First Minister and I are committed to providing leadership on improving good relations in our society. We know that the commitment to building a better future is shared right across our community. That was highlighted through the significant response that the Department received to the public consultation on the draft programme for cohesion, sharing and integration. That commitment is also shared across all five parties in the Executive. The Programme for Government, which the Assembly is being asked to endorse, underlines that by giving a firm commitment to build a united and shared society. We recognise that the key building block for achieving that will be the finalised cohesion, sharing and integration strategy.

The cross-party working group has been working intensively since September last year. It continues to meet weekly, and it has reached an advanced stage in its considerations. The group aims to complete its work and produce a final strategy and high-level action plan shortly. We recognise the importance of producing a strategy that will provide the strategic framework for us to continue to drive forward real and meaningful change right across our community, and we want to see that work reach a conclusion as soon as possible. However, we also recognise the importance of reaching agreement on the many complex issues that the strategy will seek to address.

#### 3.15 pm

**Mr McMullan:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his very detailed response. Will he update us on how flags are dealt with in the CSI strategy?

**Mr M McGuinness:** The flags protocol working group was reconvened at the request of the First Minister and me and the cross-party working group on CSI. It has met twice since December. The working group consists of representatives from other relevant Departments, including the Department of Justice, DSD and DRD, as well as representatives from local government, the Housing Executive, the PSNI, the Equality Commission, the Community Relations Council and Queen's University.

The next step for the group will be to consider a discussion paper on background and context, the impacts of flag flying, the proposed mechanism for implementation, the delivery of a new flags framework, the communication mechanism and community engagement options. The intention is that, following the agreement of a revised framework, the

document will form part of the monitoring and implementation arrangements of the CSI strategy.

**Mr Cree:** Does the deputy First Minister agree that the overriding factor for the completion of the CSI document is not the timescale but the quality of the document?

**Mr M McGuinness:** Yes. I agree absolutely.

**Mrs D Kelly:** The deputy First Minister spoke about a united and shared society in his previous answers. Does he agree that the development of the former Girdwood Barracks site could be a flagship project for building a shared future and could help meet the many needs of people who have been on a housing waiting list for a very long time?

**Mr M McGuinness:** I absolutely understand the pressures on the housing sector, and I know that the issue has been under discussion between community groups in north Belfast and the Department for Social Development. It is a matter for the Department for Social Development, but I absolutely agree that it is important that we come to a conclusion sooner rather than later.

### Social Investment Fund: Drug Addiction

4. **Ms P Bradley** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the social investment fund will address drug addiction and other systemic problems in areas of social deprivation. (AQO 1521/11-15)

**Mr M McGuinness:** The strategic objectives of the social investment fund are to support communities in building pathways to employment, tackle the systemic issues linked to deprivation, increase community services and address dereliction. Delivery is intended to be through the development and delivery of strategic area plans, which will be co-ordinated by and drawn from across the relevant investment zone and steering groups comprising community and voluntary, business, political and statutory representatives.

Drug addiction, substance abuse and other such problems may be considered under the objective focused on tackling the systemic issues linked to deprivation. It will be for communities working in partnership with government, the statutory sector and the voluntary and community sector to identify, prioritise and evidence need and propose associated interventions for inclusion in their area plans.

**Ms P Bradley:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer, in which he spoke about area plans. Given the specific difficulties around social deprivation in north Belfast, has any consideration been given to developing a strategic plan for that area and other areas like it?

**Mr M McGuinness:** Obviously, we made it clear from the beginning that the whole purpose of the social investment fund is to empower local communities. It is very important in contributing to how we move forward through the investment in the social investment fund that local communities decide what their priorities are. In the context of this particular fund, they need to put in place a strategy that meets the needs that they think are essential to the local community. It is important that empowerment takes place. This is not about us deciding how the people of north Belfast should deal with the fund; this is us telling the people of north Belfast to identify the key issues. We will then go as far as



we can to support them. The development of a strategy is in the hands of the local people.

**Mr A Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given that a number of areas have expressed concern that they are not within the zones earmarked for SIF support, are there any plans to revisit those zones to include areas with high-level deprivation that may adjoin them?

**Mr M McGuinness:** We are aware that the composition of investment zones is an issue that featured strongly during the consultation period. In setting out the proposed investment zones, we always intended that they would be flexible. Our intention has always been to ensure that we target resources at the areas in greatest objective need. Where areas are able to demonstrate objective need, we will ensure that they are considered for access to resources. However, I want to make it clear that not every area in each zone will receive funding. Funding will be allocated only in areas where objective need can be identified. We are carefully considering the views put forward in respect of the zones to see how they might best be redrawn to address the concerns expressed during the consultation.

**Mr McCarthy:** The deputy First Minister may or may not be aware that there is a very active inter-church group working in north Belfast. It is crying out for funding to provide —

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

**Mr McCarthy:** — a centre for the treatment of alcohol and substance abuse, like the one in County Kilkenny. Would the deputy First Minister —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member ask his question, please?

**Mr McCarthy:** — encourage that group to look for funding to provide such a centre?

**Mr M McGuinness:** Yes, I would. I pay tribute to all those from the churches who make a very positive contribution in communities such as north Belfast. Any ideas that emerge will be seriously considered and will no doubt be funded on the basis of merit. Again, it comes back to the issue of empowering the local community. I have no doubt whatsoever that the church group of which you speak is integrated in the local community, and I expect that its project will receive due consideration.

## OFMDFM: Freedom of Information Requests

5. **Mr Elliott** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an assessment of their Department's performance in meeting freedom of information requests within the 20-working-day deadline. (AQO 1522/11-15)

**Mr M McGuinness:** OFMDFM has received 897 freedom of information requests since the legislation was fully implemented in January 2005. Validated figures for the period 2005-2010 show that 83% of requests were answered within the 20-working-day deadline. A further 5% of requests were answered within permitted time extensions to allow for consideration of the balance of public interest. Overall, 88% of requests were answered on time.

**Mr Elliott:** I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Those figures differ from the ones in the Information Commissioner's report. Has the Information Commissioner

made any references to the First Minister and deputy First Minister on the matter?

**Mr M McGuinness:** I think that everybody knows and fully understands that, although the information people whom we are in touch with have responsibility for all this, the First Minister and I are ultimately responsible for the information entrusted to our Department and for ensuring that such information is protected, disclosed and reused appropriately. Indeed, we have a clear and vested interest in information that concerns the content and presentation of our policies. Inevitably, we become involved in the consideration of requests that concern the formulation of government policy or the effect of conduct on public affairs. Indeed, as qualified persons under section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which concerns the effective conduct of public affairs, Ministers have a statutory duty to determine whether or not information should be exempt from disclosure.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Can the deputy First Minister provide a more recent update on the performance in meeting FOI requests?

**Mr M McGuinness:** Our Department's performance compares favourably with that of other jurisdictions. In Wales, the Government answered 75% of requests on time in 2010, while the Scottish Government answered 84% on time in the same year. The Whitehall Departments answered 84% of requests on time for the period 2008-2010.

**Mr I McCrea:** The deputy First Minister has referred to the disproportionate use of freedom of information requests and the need to ensure that such requests are made for good reason rather than any reason. Does he have a view on whether it is a good use of legislation and on whether the whole issue of freedom of information requests should be reviewed?

**Mr M McGuinness:** Freedom of information has existed for some time. In the aftermath of his stint in Downing Street, Tony Blair cited it as one of the most regrettable decisions that he ever made. However, it exists, and we have to abide by its rules and regulations. There is absolutely no doubt that freedom of information allows people to abuse their access to information. That is not confined to people outside the House: some people in the House leave me wondering whether they do anything other than write to Departments for information that, on many occasions, is absolutely worthless.

## Equality Commission and Human Rights Commission: Merger

6. **Mr McCallister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration they have given to merging the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission. (AQO 1523/11-15)

**Mr M McGuinness:** With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Anderson to answer the question.

**Ms M Anderson:** Go raibh míle maith agat. The Equality Commission is an arm's-length body sponsored by OFMDFM, and the Human Rights Commission is sponsored by the NIO. There are no plans to merge the two bodies. Our office has undertaken extensive work to collocate a range of our

arm's-length bodies through which we will provide a more effective service to the public and achieve financial savings estimated by officials to be up to £1.6 million by 2015.

On a wider point, the Executive Budget review group has been taking forward a review of arm's-length bodies throughout all Departments with the objective of assessing whether individual bodies might be abolished, absorbed into parent Departments or merged with another body, with resulting efficiencies and savings. The outcome of the central analysis of data provided by Departments has recently been given to Ministers for further consideration of the status of the bodies that they sponsor.

**Mr McCallister:** I am grateful to the junior Minister for her reply. Can she assure the House that all bodies will be looked at and kept in place only if they are proven to give valuable service to people? Can she also highlight a timescale for decisions on those bodies?

**Ms M Anderson:** As I said, the Executive have agreed criteria for the review of arm's-length bodies that is being carried out by the Budget review group. An analysis of that information is being completed centrally by OFMDFM and Department of Finance and Personnel officials. The Budget review group recently considered a progress report. As I stated in my substantive answer, all Ministers, including the Minister from the Member's party, are being invited to consider the implications of the central analysis of their Department's bodies. As soon as Ministers come back to us with that consideration, that will be taken forward.

**Mr A Maginness:** I agree that there should be no merger of the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission. The Human Rights Commission was established under the Good Friday Agreement. Can the Minister assure the House that that separation will be maintained, although collocation —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I believe that we have had a question; perhaps, even, a number of questions. Thank you.

**Ms M Anderson:** Under the NI Act 1998, the Human Rights Commission and the observance and implementation of obligations under the human rights convention are excepted matters. The commission is sponsored and funded by NIO; its commissioners are appointed by the Secretary of State. Under the same Act, the Equality Commission is a reserved matter. Its commissioners are appointed by the Secretary of State, although that commission is sponsored and funded by OFMDFM. The Equality Commission has a statutory remit to challenge discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity through anti-discrimination statutes. The commission's work in general undoubtedly contributes to a reduction in discrimination.

**Mr F McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that there are gaps in human rights protection for older people?

**Ms M Anderson:** Yes. Undoubtedly, there are gaps in human rights protection for older people. The Human Rights Commission has just published a report entitled 'In Defence of Dignity', which found that current law and regulations fall short in their ability to protect older people, particularly in nursing homes. The need to streamline legislation to provide robust protection and safeguards for older people has never been more clearly needed than in the case highlighted by

DUP MP Jeffrey Donaldson of a Mrs McCluskey, whose carer admitted to abuse of the 70-year-old Alzheimer's sufferer.

However, the legislation is somewhat fragmented and is spread across countless Bills, making almost a jumble of protections that are easily confused or lost. As some have commented, confused law is, at times, no law at all.

3.30 pm

## Executive Committee Business

### Programme for Government

*Debate resumed on motion:*

*That this Assembly endorses the Programme for Government 2011-15 agreed by the Executive. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister).]*

**Mr G Robinson:** First, I commend everyone who has been involved in producing the Programme for Government. It must have been a difficult and challenging task. However, the task has been met, and we, as a government, need to make sure that we deliver for all our people. With the loss of £4 billion from the Executive's Budget, the Finance Minister, in particular, has had a difficult role. I especially congratulate him for ensuring that the Programme for Government will target funding to essential areas in our Province.

In November, the First Minister said:

*"Our job is not to stand back and observe but to use the powers and resources at our disposal to make a difference." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 68, p382, col 1].*

The Programme for Government matches his words. Despite the fact that there are fewer monetary resources, only a growing and vibrant economy will provide the people of Northern Ireland with an opportunity to use their skills and to create a wealthier and happier future for everyone here.

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

Importantly, the Programme for Government focuses on Northern Ireland's infrastructure. That focus includes a relaying of the Londonderry to Coleraine rail link, major road-building programmes and investment in our most precious asset — our young people. The one disappointment that I have is the omission of the Dungiven bypass and the upgrade of the A26. Those two schemes are essential from a health and road safety point of view. I must stress the importance of ensuring that our young people have the necessary skills to gain employment now and in the future. Therefore, the investment in our young people is a great investment in Northern Ireland's future.

In November, the First Minister said:

*"The reality is that we cannot simply react passively to world events as they happen. We need to proactively seek out the opportunities for Northern Ireland to become a leading light in the recovery that will inevitably follow the bad times." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 68, p384, col 1].*

The Programme for Government is a proactive response to the current economic situation. The First Minister pointed out how seeking inward investment without the road, the rail, and, most importantly, the workforce infrastructure would damage Northern Ireland's appeal to future investors.

I welcome the Executive's concentration on assisting small and medium-sized businesses through keeping the regional rate rise consistent with the rate of inflation and the

introduction of a loan fund to help with cash flows. My party and I hope that the Assembly sees that although we need foreign investment to help to develop our economy, we have not and will not overlook our indigenous small and medium-sized businesses, which are the bedrock of our economy. It is important that non-contentious planning applications with the potential for major job creation are given special consideration and are granted inside six months. That will be yet another aid in the development of companies.

When the power to set air passenger duty is devolved, I welcome the plan to eliminate air passenger duty on long-haul flights. That can only be a boost to the tourism and business sectors and will, for example, help to bring visitors to the Titanic Quarter, the new Bushmills golf course and the new Giant's Causeway visitor centre.

Through the measures in the Programme for Government, its aim is to create a wealthier Northern Ireland, with many more people in employment. That will have the effect of reducing the numbers of those who are classed as living in poverty or suffering from fuel poverty. Despite the Budget being decimated by £4 billion, the Executive's proposals show their commitment to Northern Ireland and the future of its people. I urge the Assembly to support the motion, which, in my mind, will keep Northern Ireland moving forward.

### **Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment):**

In order to provide the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister with a comprehensive response to the Programme for Government consultation, the Committee for the Environment, on 24 November 2011, agreed to invite stakeholders to submit comments. Stakeholders were encouraged to focus their responses on perceived gaps in the draft Programme for Government, milestones and outputs, and the monitoring process. Twenty-one organisations responded, and on 12 January 2012, the Committee hosted a stakeholder event.

The aim of the evidence session was to provide stakeholders with a platform to air their concerns and issues and, ultimately, to inform the Committee's formal response. In general, although stakeholders welcomed the fact that a draft Programme for Government had been produced, most felt that the language used in it was vague and that it lacked vision. When it came to perceived gaps, milestones and monitoring, stakeholders highlighted a number of more specific concerns.

Having considered those concerns, the Committee made a number of recommendations. Many of the perceived gaps identified by stakeholders and endorsed by the Committee related to waste. The Committee recommends that targets for non-domestic waste, as well as for domestic waste, should be included in the Programme for Government. Although targets for domestic waste are good, the Committee believes that it is essential that there are also targets to work towards reducing industrial waste. More than four times as much waste is generated by industry than by ordinary households, yet the sole focus of the draft Programme for Government in relation to waste appeared to be on domestic waste.

The Committee also wanted to see measures that encourage the prevention and reuse of waste, as well as those for recycling. That would ensure that the Programme for Government reflects the universal waste hierarchy of reduce, reuse and recycle. Several stakeholders also suggested that the

Programme for Government should recognise Northern Ireland's urgent need for waste management infrastructure. The Committee agreed that in order to ensure that we meet our commitment to reducing the amount of waste going to landfill, it would be beneficial to have a target for the provision of waste infrastructure.

Moving on from waste, the Committee felt that the Programme for Government should have included more detail about the local government reform process. This is such a significant change that there should be more information about how it will happen, how it will be funded and what practical steps will be taken to ensure the seamless transfer of functions from central government to local councils. On balance, the Committee welcomed the commitment to faster planning decisions that could lead to job creation and economic development. However, the Committee stressed that that should not be to the detriment of social and environmental considerations.

Indeed, although sustainability is listed as an underlying principle of the Programme for Government, the Committee recommended that greater emphasis should be placed on sustainability, with specific actions aimed at promoting opportunities for sustainable approaches such as those offered by the green new deal. The Committee recommended that the Programme for Government should highlight the implications of climate change and identified opportunities to address the issue through the introduction of new policies. For example, the introduction of a food security strategy that focuses on the benefits of greater use of locally produced food.

I will move on to milestones. In general, the Committee felt that the milestones in the draft Programme for Government were not sufficiently detailed or challenging. In its response to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Committee for the Environment strongly recommended the introduction of SMART — specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound — targets to enable progress and success to be measured.

However, the Committee is mindful that the programme is an overarching document and, as such, should not be laden with details of how objectives should be achieved. Instead, members were keen to see a requirement for each Department to produce a detailed action plan that includes challenging targets and timelines on how and when they will deliver their commitments in the programme.

With regard to monitoring, the Committee has ongoing concerns about the current approach of self-reporting that is used by Departments for assessing the public service agreements and suggested that Assembly Committees should have a more clearly recognised role in monitoring and sanctioning departmental progress. Therefore, the Committee cautiously welcomes the proposed monitoring and reporting arrangements for the new programme that the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) recently outlined to the Finance and Personnel Committee. The initial reaction of the Committee is that the suggested departmental delivery plans echo the Committee's recommendations, particularly if they succeed in identifying the main actions that are to be taken to achieve outputs and objectives, associated resource requirements, clear lines of responsibility, timescales and SMART targets, along with a requirement for quarterly delivery reporting to the Assembly.

We have now had a chance, albeit brief, to see the final programme, and I welcome the inclusion of a target date and additional measures to halt the loss of biodiversity. The inclusion of a more specific commitment for increasing household recycling and composting to 45% by 2015 is also welcome, although I remain disappointed that there are still no measures for industrial waste.

Another disappointment is that there has been no change to the commitment for RPA. The focus remains on numbers, which makes it even more important that the Department produces a detailed action plan that clearly identifies the processes that are going to take place and when. It also emphasises the need for good communication with councils and training for staff and councillors. A lot more work needs to be done, and we need the councils to be on board with that work.

Those issues apart, the Environment Committee welcomes, subject to proper resources, the priorities in the programme relating to the inclusion of social clauses in all public procurement contracts and the target for 90% of large-scale planning decisions to be made within six months. We welcome the target for the continued reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by a minimum of 35% against 1990 levels by 2025, greater protection and enhancement of the environment and a reduction in the environmental impact from waste. The Committee also endorses the overarching aim of the programme to build a vibrant economy that can transform our society by dealing with deprivation and poverty. However, the Committee believes that that focus on the economy should be actioned in ways that protect and enhance the environment and use resources as effectively and sustainably as possible. Before closing, I thank the stakeholders that informed the Committee's response, and on behalf of the Environment Committee, I support the motion.

In my remaining minute or so, I will speak as the Alliance Party's spokesperson on the environment. Although we endorse the comments from the Environment Committee, I will highlight a number of other issues that are of concern to us. First, the Programme for Government contains no mention of any proposals to look at establishing national parks, although it was mentioned in the economic strategy as a way of promoting tourism.

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

**3.45 pm**

**Ms Lo:** We are disappointed that the word "marine" is mentioned only twice.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Your time is up.

**Ms Lo:** We know that the Marine Bill is going through the Assembly but it does not include a marine management organisation.

**Mr Kinahan:** As ever, I am pleased to speak to the motion, and like my colleague, I give an overarching welcome to the Programme for Government, even though it comes in the wrong order in that it is before the Budget rather than after it. We should perhaps develop that in future so that it appears after the Budget and works itself properly through party manifestos so that we get our government in the right order.

I do not want to be negative all the time. The Programme for Government sets out a lot of intentions, many of which we should all welcome. A great deal of it does seem to be motherhood and apple pie, but there is much to praise. I am pleased that it includes job targets, extra spend on health and many other issues. However, it is often too vague with too few targets and timelines. The public want things to happen quickly and they want to be included. We have to make sure that the pressure is kept up.

I still see myself as a new boy to politics, and if there is one observation that I can make, it is how slow we are at doing things. In the previous mandate, when I was on the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I asked in January about the end date for a particular document. I was told that an interim document would be brought back in March. I pointed out that the mandate was due to end in March, so we had better have the document a week earlier. My colleague said that a week earlier made no difference because it would still be only an interim document. I am sure that that puts it back on the shelf. We have to start thinking about getting timelines in place and making things happen.

Another major example is the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy, which I long to see in place. However, we still do not seem to have a framework on how we put it into action on the ground. Is there a matrix? Do we have to have talks, or even talks about talks, in each area? The strategy needs leadership on the ground, and the Assembly has to start to find ways to turn strategies into actions. In my brief time as a councillor, the major issue of gatekeepers, whether political or in local groups, needed to be tackled because a way had to be found to get local people to feel that they could join any group, have their say and, if necessary, lead into the future.

As the Ulster Unionist environment spokesman, I wish to speak about the environment. The Programme for Government mentions the green economy, yet we hear nothing about the green new deal. We must find a way to get more green issues into the actions that I assume will be put in place through the Programme for Government. If we look at the future of rivers, marine, heritage and other issues, the only funding that is in place is the carrier bag tax. We need to look at the resources and find the right way to take forward the green new deal and to get it in place.

On Thursday last week, the Environment Committee was briefed on ecosystems and services. We need to find a way to get all the environmental language taken on and put in place through every single departmental decision. That does not happen at the moment. I am disappointed that in the Programme for Government, marine planning did not include a marine management organisation. We want to see one. We cannot simply have a joint Assembly group that hopes to be able to have more influence. We must have a body that drives marine planning forward; otherwise, it will never happen.

It is good to see recycling targets of 45%. However, that is all. We should be looking at better recycling targets and better ways to recycle. I was a councillor on Antrim Borough Council, which is on 42%, so we need to set good, challenging and achievable targets for every council.

We need to know the future of the three waste companies. Is that the way forward? Does the Programme for Government

want us to go that way? How does it balance with the private sector? How will we get the mix right? I want the Programme for Government to drive whatever is the right way forward.

Climate change is hardly touched on in the Programme for Government. It states:

*"To continue to project at least a 35% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 based on 1990 baseline".*

What does it mean by "project"? It just says that we will look at the targets rather than try to achieve them. We have to find a way forward. We all know, from watching television and everything else, that global warming is happening; whether man-made or not, we must take actions. The Programme for Government is very weak on getting any actions taken that will tackle climate change. If you think that the sea is warming and our fish stocks are dying, that is vital to all of us. If you look at the weather we have had in the past few years, with the cold spell last year and the wet spell this year, which destroyed our potato harvest, global warming is something that we have to take on board. We must not shy away from the environment; it must be part of every decision rather than just blanked out of the side.

Another matter that I want to see, which Anna Lo touched on, is the reorganisation of councils. It is excellent to see it in the Programme for Government, but we have to make sure that it happens properly. We have to see a way in which it works for all of us. Are the Executive behind it? Are they really going to push for the reorganisation of councils? Are all the MLAs in here behind pushing for that, and are the councillors themselves? We have to put it across that change will happen in councils and that we all have to drive it. It was my party colleague, Sam Foster, who, many years ago, proposed the changes in local government. We have to put in place the right resources and make sure that we give them the right powers.

Planning is part of that, and it is mentioned in the Programme for Government, but will that planning bring the jobs and the changes that will lead to future jobs for all of us? Where has coterminosity gone? It is a ghastly but important word. We wanted everything working together. We have Westminster, Assembly and council boundary changes coming; yet, at the same time, there are different boundaries for the police and for education. We have to see that driven properly, but the Programme for Government gives me no confidence that that will happen. Do we have a sensible way forward? Logic still says 15 or, if Westminster reduces by two seats, 14. That is the Ulster Unionist Party policy.

Change must happen, and it must happen quickly; we will not get in the way of it. However, we must keep looking at it and reviewing it so that we get it working best within the boundaries. A huge concern for us is the fact that Belfast may be reworked within the boundaries so that it no longer remains unionist. Is that really what we want? Do we want Belfast, our capital, our heart, to become a nationalist-run capital? I do not believe that that is something that we want to tie ourselves to for the future. *[Interruption.]* It is interesting to listen to comments. We have to think it through. That also means that we would be getting a Belfast run by a Marxist or communist party if we let it go that way. I am not against socialism, but I am against the despotic

form of it that has worked nowhere in the world. I do not think that the electorate would want that.

We must remember that government must be carried out where it can best be delivered for the people, and I do not feel that that is necessarily what we are putting in place. Councils need resources and funding, and we must find a way of giving them that funding —

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

**Mr Kinahan:** — whether that be loans or bonds. We must look at how we reorganise our government properly. That will be our big test.

**Mr Wells:** The greatest achievement of the previous Programme for Government and Assembly was the fact that we sustained ourselves and kept democracy alive in Northern Ireland. We overcame many challenges during that period, and we now have a form of settled and relatively stable democracy in this part of the United Kingdom. The public will expect this Programme for Government to deliver something radically improved on that in the next period. People out there expect devolution to make a difference and an improvement. This document, therefore, will be a challenge to us all; we have to deliver. In four years' time, we have to say to the public that Northern Ireland is a better place as a result of 108 MLAs and an Executive. If we cannot prove that, I am afraid that we will leave ourselves wide open to ridicule.

I can understand the thought processes behind what happened with the document. Each Department was to propose various policy strategies that they saw as important and that should be put into the PFG. Presumably, the special advisers got around tables and there was a bargaining exercise about what should go in and what should not, and then that was referred up to Ministers. It seems that, basically, every Department has had its allocation of policies, strategies and targets. However, health is, of course, by far and away the most important Department in expenditure and employment terms, with 70,000 full-time equivalents in Northern Ireland. Therefore, 40% of the Budget is allocated to health. It is dominant in the Budget, and it should be the same for the Programme for Government. However, I notice that that fact is not reflected in the strategies and policies outlined. I can understand why, but the Health Committee, when it looked at the issue, was not particularly happy. Let us be honest: the budget for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure is so small that you could put it in the broom cupboard of the Health Department. We are talking about a totally different league of expenditure and importance. Yet, when you look at the document, you would think that all Departments were equal. They are not. I would like to think that in future Programmes for Government, we can give more emphasis to the health agenda. It is so critical.

I strongly welcome, however, the health policies that are outlined in the Programme for Government. I am particularly keen on the emphasis on the public health agenda. Is this perhaps our opportunity in Northern Ireland to tackle the lifestyle choices that cause so many problems in our health service? I understand that 'The Belfast Telegraph' had at least one if not two reporters placed at various A&Es over the past weekend. They are about to do an exposé of the impact of the abuse of alcohol on accident and emergency

departments in hospitals throughout Northern Ireland. We know, for instance, that alcohol is estimated to cost the Northern Ireland exchequer £800 million a year. That, of course, affects not just the Health Department; it affects the Department of Justice, the Department for Social Development, etc. If we could solve that problem, that amount of money would, effectively, solve our economic difficulties. What would an extra £800 million not achieve in all Departments? It would be a windfall of dynamic proportions.

I am delighted that we have a commitment in the Programme for Government to increase spending on public health annually as a proportion of the overall Budget. We are placing far more emphasis on preventing people getting to the clinic, GP or hospital rather than curing them once they arrive there. That has to be a good thing. Green shoots are already appearing. Last Thursday, we had a ban on the use of tobacco-vending machines. That is a good move; it will prevent many young people accessing tobacco in a way that cannot be controlled. We have greater control over the use of sunbeds. We are bringing in a ban on the point-of-sale display of tobacco products. In other words, you will no longer go to a newsagent or supermarket and have a massive display promoting tobacco facing you at the till.

That is good news. We are moving. However, I would like to think that the period of this Programme for Government will be the era in which we will see perhaps the most important public health change in Northern Ireland, and that is control over the abuse of alcohol.

#### 4.00 pm

There have been promising indications that we are moving to the minimum pricing of alcohol in the Province. If that happens, it has to be extremely welcome. There is absolutely no doubt that there is something perverse about a society where mass-produced alcohol can be sold at a lower price than bottled water. That is just crazy. In every town and village in Northern Ireland, we all see examples of young people, often teenagers, going into supermarkets on a Friday or Saturday night, buying ridiculously cheap alcohol, getting tanked up — I think that is the phrase — and then going to a pub or club, where they drink heavy alcohol, such as vodka and so on. By the end of the Programme for Government, we must have a policy that prevents that. Therefore, I welcome the commitment by the Department for Social Development, the Department of Health and the DOE to prevent that. I would like to think that we will see delivery on that issue during this programme. If we do not, we will completely overload many aspects of our health service. I do not want to spike the guns of our local newspapers, but I suspect that, when that story is revealed, it will shock the nation to see what goes on in hospitals throughout the Province on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. I am aware of one hospital that has to employ four security guards on a Saturday night, simply to cope with the violence and disruption caused by those who are the worse for wear. That cannot be allowed to continue, or our health service will become completely overwhelmed and we will not be able to attract junior doctors and consultants to work weekend shifts.

I am also pleased that the Programme for Government has allocated £7.2 million to tackle obesity. Indeed, Minister Poots launched the obesity strategy in Craigavon on Friday. That is a step in the right direction: if the stats on alcohol are scary, the stats on obesity are frightening. The Health

Committee held an inquiry into obesity two years ago which concluded that, if the nettle of obesity is not grasped and dealt with, it will overwhelm the health service in two decades. Simply put, no matter how many resources we have, we will not be able to tackle the problems caused by obesity, which are mainly, of course, type 2 diabetes and increases in coronary heart disease and some cancers. Therefore, we have to get this right, and it is incredibly encouraging that the Department has decided to give additional funding. Far too many people in the Province, particularly children, are obese, and we are storing up huge problems for ourselves.

Allied with that — I mentioned the steps being taken to prevent the display and vending of tobacco products — each year, in Northern Ireland, 2,300 people die often horribly painful and lingering deaths as a result of tobacco abuse. We must use this Programme for Government to tackle that issue. These are utterly needless deaths of people hooked on an addictive substance that is one of the most dangerous on the planet. I equally suspect that, unless we do something about that, we will store up further trouble for ourselves. The warning signs are there. It is clear that the Department is grasping them, but I just hope that it will be backed by the resolve of the House and that there will not be cries of “nanny state”. People in Northern Ireland have the freedom of the fox in the chicken run. They have the freedom to indulge in life-threatening activities. The problem is that the Assembly and the Executive also have the freedom to pick up the vast tab to deal with the consequences of those freedoms. That is paid not by those involved in these activities but by society as a whole. Let us be clear: we must start to make it much more difficult to access the products that cause such difficulties.

On a slightly different issue, we face huge challenges on Bamford. The new legislation arising from Bamford will be brought through in this Programme for Government. Indeed, it is highlighted as one of the main targets. That will probably be the largest piece of legislation that the current Assembly will see. It will be hugely demanding and difficult for the Committee, the Executive and the Assembly to see it through safely. However, this is our once-in-a-generation opportunity to ensure that service provision and the protection of those with mental health difficulties are state-of-the-art and that we have the leading strategy in western Europe. We must grasp the opportunity. Sadly, I was in the Assembly in 1983 when the last legislation went through, and here we are, all these years later, and another generation has passed. We must grasp the opportunity and ensure that people with mental illness, which tends to be the Cinderella aspect of the health service, have the best possible provision, treatment and protection in the future.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member draw his remarks to a close? You have done; thank you.

**Mr Flanagan:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am delighted to be here to contribute to the debate, particularly as I was unable to be here for the debate on the draft Programme for Government in November 2011. At that time, I was involved in intense negotiations, not with other political parties or lobby groups but with a private clamper in south Belfast who ruined my day and cost me £85. Perhaps the deputy First Minister will take that issue back to the Executive and try to get some progress on the regulation of private clampers.

The Programme for Government clearly outlines where the Executive's priorities lie over the next few years, and it sets out clearly the targets that lie ahead. Since 2007, the Executive and Assembly have largely been judged on their stability. However, since the last election, expectations have been raised, rightly so, among our citizens. As one of those citizens, I have similarly high expectations: not that we can all — just about — sit in the same room and talk to each other but that we are all concentrated on the same objective of improving the lives of all the people we represent. So, we will not be judged on our ability to continue to come here, on how well strategies can be drafted or on how well we can write plans or consultation documents. The First Minister said that in his opening contribution. Instead, we will be judged on our delivery against the targets that have been set. All 108 MLAs in the House, particularly those who sit on the Executive, will be judged on their ability to deliver for all our people, and this Programme for Government is a positive outlook on where we need to be and, most importantly, how we get there. So, I look forward to seeing the detail of this programme being put in place and people reaping tangible benefits from it through the creation of additional jobs, the attraction of additional tourists, a reduction in energy prices, further improvements to our education system or measures such as the installation of double-glazed windows. Citizens need to see delivery on the ground. People understand statistics and percentages perfectly well, but making a difference to their daily lives is the challenge that lies ahead for each and every one of us.

As Sinn Féin spokesperson for enterprise, trade and investment, I will now cover a number of the key aspects that apply to that Department. Huge targets have been set for the promotion of jobs, and Invest NI must recognise that indigenous businesses must be our priority in job creation and in growing a sustainable private sector that is focused not only on growing exports but on reducing dependence on imported goods. It is very positive to see figures broken down in the Programme for Government on how Invest NI has been told to give out grants. Targets have been set, and it is particularly positive to see that indigenous businesses make up the largest share of that £1 billion investment. That highlights their key importance in growing the local economy.

Many people will, rightly, welcome the introduction of the loan fund and the progress made to date on it. However, we need to remember that serious problems still exist in the banking sector and with the availability of finance for indigenous businesses, regardless of size. The loan fund will assist a small number of our larger firms — around 150 by the end of the term — but it will assist only those wishing to borrow more than £50,000 at a time. Most microenterprises would be excluded from that, so I hope that the Executive can take appropriate action and introduce the previously spoken about small, medium and microenterprise loan fund, which will offer loans of between £1,000 and £50,000 to a wider business base that will also include social enterprises. Such a measure would be a welcome addition to the current portfolio available to our job creation agency.

As we are all very aware and as we have seen from job loss announcements, especially the huge losses in the retail banking sector, many businesses face extremely difficult trading conditions. A more proactive approach from the Executive in providing such businesses with early practical assistance would be useful. Perhaps a measure along the lines of the financial capability strategy for consumers,

which is proposed in the Programme for Government, or some alternative measure that could help struggling businesses get back on their feet could be assessed. Such an intervention, at an early stage, would be just as useful as creating jobs.

Right across the globe, there is huge duplication in attracting foreign direct investment onto this island. Invest NI and the Industrial Development Authority both carry out the same roles at huge expense to taxpayers. I am sure that, with greater co-operation and integration between those organisations, huge sums of money could be saved and could be put back into creating much-needed jobs on the ground in deprived areas.

If we are to be successful in attracting foreign investors to locate here and assisting our own businesses to expand, we need to ensure that every action possible is taken to reduce their operating costs and improve their competitiveness. The proposal to devolve and reduce corporation tax may well be one of the measures that are implemented. However, it is not necessarily the most important, most effective or best value for the Executive. A decision needs to be taken at some stage on whether corporation tax should be reduced. I firmly believe that it should be devolved, but a decision to reduce it cannot be made until we are aware of all the facts, particularly what it will cost the Executive. More immediate measures that should be looked at include the potential for reform of the non-domestic rating system so that businesses would pay rates based on their profits and not on the value of a building, which they may only rent. That could be done prior to the revaluation that DFP plans to carry out in 2015. Energy costs are far too high. Regressive taxes such as VAT and fuel duty are far too high and are crippling many businesses and households of all sizes. Those areas, too, need focus. Not all our attention should be on corporation tax.

As well as the much talked-about availability of finance problems faced by businesses seeking to expand, there are huge problems in our planning system. Delays are having a detrimental impact on the ability of our businesses to grow. That is particularly the case with statutory consultations, when there are huge delays in getting a response from Roads Service and the Environment Agency. It is clear that decisions on all planning applications need to be made much more quickly in order to support our economy. Many employed in the construction sector would welcome such a move, as would those waiting to invest in capital projects, so it is positive to see such a target in the Programme for Government.

This document and the economic strategy that will be discussed tomorrow outline the key sectors that we will focus on to enable economic growth. One of those sectors is agrifood. There is much scope for greater co-operation and integration with the rest of the island on food promotion across the globe. The potential for growth in that sector would exponentially increase if we were to embark on such a course.

Although the creation of jobs has to be a key priority for the Assembly, it is also critical that our citizens are appropriately skilled up in the sectors where business and industry need them and that regular and meaningful engagement happens between industry, the Executive and the education system to ensure that a skilled workforce is in place to fill those jobs. We see many announcements of job losses right across

society, leaving people out of work and fearful for their future. Out of a crisis, however, there lies an opportunity. When nothing is certain, everything is possible — that is a quotation from Barry McElduff, by the way. Much more support needs to be given to those who have recently become unemployed but have a certain skill set or expertise that could be slightly tailored to meet the current demands of industry. I would also welcome greater support for young entrepreneurs, even those who are still in education and who may spot an opportunity to start their own business.

Energy prices are, as I said, far too high, inhibiting the growth of business and having a major impact on households. As a society, we are far too reliant on non-sustainable and harmful fossil fuels. We are not tapping into the potential that exists on this island for clean and renewable sources of energy for electricity and heat. The Programme for Government puts in place ambitious and challenging targets of 20% of our electricity and 4% of our heat from renewable sources by 2015, which I welcome as an initial target. However, we could do much better. There are serious questions to be asked of each Department. How can we set a target for renewable heat when public sector organisations continue to use natural gas or home heating oil to heat their buildings? If we are serious about the targets, all public sector organisations will begin to look at the potential for renewable heat generators. The Central Procurement Directorate needs to start facilitating that. I have heard numerous reports from the renewable energy industry that not enough is being done to move public sector buildings away from gas and even home heating oil.

I am firmly of the belief that the island of Ireland can become self-sufficient in renewable energy generation by 2020. However, there needs to be a radical change in how things are done. I am hopeful that much of that work will be central to the new energy Bill, and my party will soon publish its own proposals for the future of energy on this island.

The implementation of an ambitious retrofitting programme, as put forward by the Green New Deal Group, needs to be a key aspect of our energy and fuel poverty strategy. That will also assist in the creation and retention of thousands of jobs. Therefore, I encourage the Executive to take that matter forward as a matter of strategic importance.

Too much emphasis has been placed on the greater Belfast area and on selected parts of the north coast as far as the tourism industry is concerned. Balanced subregional growth will not be possible if that trend continues. In the Programme for Government, there is brief mention of the potential for again hosting the Irish Open in 2015.

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

**Mr Flanagan:** It will be a tremendous achievement for the Executive if that can happen, but I am sure that there will be huge competition over where the proposed event will be.

#### 4.15 pm

**Mr Durkan:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The SDLP broadly agrees with the five key priorities laid out in the Programme for Government. However, we remain concerned about the continuing lack of detail in the document. The very reason for making a Programme for Government is to set targets and measure the effectiveness of the Government in reaching them. The vague nature



of the key commitments in each priority area and the lack of measurable targets in the document will make it very difficult to conduct any analysis of effectiveness or otherwise. This results in a continuing lack of clarity about how the vision aspired to in this document will be achieved and which areas are to be prioritised. We believe that the final document still demonstrates lack of ambition and innovative thinking.

At this time of hardship for many in our community, devolution must deliver. With the juggernaut of welfare reform and its draconian cuts en route from London, we need the Executive to commit to and prioritise ways for this institution to protect those who are most vulnerable. We should not accept devolution that is no better than direct rule. We have options to reform and modernise and to create employment opportunities and incentivise work by making it pay rather than victimising those who are unable to work and making them pay. We must reform our health service to deliver high-quality front line services. All of this should be crystal clear in our Programme for Government. We owe it to those we represent to make ourselves accountable to them and to deliver.

It makes no sense to make the Programme for Government after we set a Budget. We are in danger of setting priorities based on the money available rather than finding money to meet our priorities. This is a failure to manage as a working Executive and Assembly.

We cannot simply settle for getting through a mandate, as Mr Wells said; we must challenge ourselves not only to get through it but to excel and deliver. We welcome a number of new commitments in the document, quite a few of which we had flagged up in our response to the consultation on the draft. The inclusion of social clauses in all public procurement contracts for supplies, services, and construction will help struggling local people get local opportunities.

We welcome the prioritisation of alleviating fuel poverty. The proposal in the initial document to double-glaze all Housing Executive homes was merely window dressing in that respect. I would like more detail of the additional measures that are to be put in place as per this document.

The commitment to build 6,000 social and 2,000 affordable homes is welcome. However, we would like to see more specific details about that with respect to house types, as changes to housing benefit will dictate demand for more smaller units and HMOs. We would like to see more social housing built at a time when need has never been higher and construction costs have never been lower.

We acknowledge the commitment to the implementation of a childcare strategy. We hope that it can be fulfilled this time. We are concerned that, if it is not fulfilled and if we do not provide access to affordable and safe childcare, the implications of welfare reform will be even more sharply felt.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I welcome the opportunity to add this point. Does the Member think that the British Government should fund childcare places, given that they funded all the places in England and Wales? Does he also agree that the childcare strategy is a fundamental building block if the economy is the number one priority in the Programme for Government?

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Member for her question. The childcare strategy and its implementation should be funded by Westminster, and its failure to do so might be perceived as a breach of parity, as it did in England.

We are concerned at the dilution in this Programme for Government of the commitment to tackle child poverty. We should aspire to eradicate it, as the original document did. The welfare of our children is paramount and not to be compromised on.

We perceive that the zeal with which some Departments set about making cuts is not matched in their appetite for protecting the most vulnerable. The SDLP has an unwavering commitment to tackling disadvantage and shielding vulnerable households from the worst impacts of the undeniably grim economic situation. We believe that the coalition Government's welfare cuts and aspects of welfare reform will have a significant detrimental impact on our community. Worryingly, given the potential impact of welfare reform, it is referenced only once in the document. The SDLP believes — we brought it before the House — that the Executive must ensure that they make opposition to the more damaging aspects of welfare reform their highest priority. This programme certainly does not do that.

We welcome the fact that our call for a financial capability strategy has not fallen on deaf ears. We need that to be actioned immediately, as the change to universal credit will undoubtedly result in more of our constituents encountering financial difficulty and debt. We welcome the upgrading of the social protection fund to an annual fund, which was also an SDLP proposal last year. However, on their own, hardship funds of this nature are neither sufficient nor sustainable as a means of tackling poverty. Given that the Budget provided funding for only one year, we wonder where that money will come from. We sincerely hope that it will not come from the remodelling of the social fund and that this is not a disingenuous attempt to portray it as new money to help those in most need.

We are disappointed by the absence from the programme of a mortgage relief or rescue scheme, despite unanimous support for such a scheme in the Chamber only months ago. More and more people are struggling with mortgage debt, and the number of repossessions continues to rise. The cost of helping those people would be nowhere near as great as the financial, societal and personal cost of more people being plunged into homelessness and its associated problems.

As a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I have concerns about the lack of specifics in the document. I welcome the overarching aims of Investing for Health and the commitment to establish a strategy for safeguarding children and adults in a domestic and sexual violence and abuse strategy. The document recognises the importance of public health and commits to allocating an increased percentage of the Budget, but we want to know how much of an actual increase that will equate to.

Given that the Compton report has now been published and, it seems, adopted in the document, it would have been useful to see the Department's targets and how it envisages investing in healthcare in respect of front line services and administration. We broadly agree with a lot of the sentiments of the Compton review. However, it is pretty vague about how we will reconfigure, reform and modernise

the delivery of health and social care services to improve patient care. It is vital that the funding that it receives is sufficient. The first attempt at reconfiguration, namely the closure of the A&E department at the City Hospital, has certainly not improved patient care. Patients and staff at the Newry and Causeway A&E departments will be worrying about their apparently as yet undecided fate.

We would like to see a clear vision for health and social care in the document. The last Programme for Government was weighed down by a plethora of pledges. I fear that the failure to fulfil so many of those has resulted in a distinct lack of ambition this time round. There has also been a fairly limited exploration of the value of North/South co-operation. In particular, given the Health Minister's continued statements on the need to explore North/South opportunities to safeguard front line services and the best delivery of high-quality care, a commitment to those options should have been made as a workable option in the Programme for Government to maximise the effectiveness —

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

**Mr Durkan:** — of continually reducing budgets and to manage ever-increasing demands due to the ageing demographic here.

**Mr Humphrey:** As a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I support the Programme for Government. There were 45 written responses to the consultation process, and I welcome the contributions from those who took part in it.

The Executive's commitment to building a safe, peaceful and fair society and improving the quality of life for all our people in Northern Ireland is to be welcomed. Obviously, a strong economy is needed to help deliver those aims, and the economic strategy is a key building block to the Executive's top priority of growing a substantial economy and building and improving investment in the future. Developing a strong economy and improving Northern Ireland's competitiveness is essential. During the consultation process, stakeholders welcomed the strategic focus in the report on economic growth and the focus on actions that will deliver the rebalancing of the economy.

I welcome the fact that there are 76 commitments in the draft Programme for Government. However, given the readiness to accept criticism, perhaps there were too many commitments in the draft Programme for Government, and they were overstretched.

Revised targets in respect of manufacturing exports growth have increased from 15% to 20% from the draft Programme for Government. That is to be welcomed. New commitment on youth unemployment to deliver 6,000 work experience and training opportunities for young people by 2015 is also to be welcomed and will be greatly welcomed in my constituency of North Belfast and others like it.

New targets for tourism numbers and visitor spend are to rise to 4.2 million and £676 million by 2014. Those figures are extremely ambitious but are to be welcomed. In Belfast, which is a regional transport hub for Northern Ireland, between 15,000 and 20,000 people are employed full time and part time in the tourism and hospitality sector. Last

year, we welcomed eight million visitors to the city, and they spent in excess of £400 million.

Long-term, meaningful employment is the key to the economic success of Northern Ireland. The target of 25,000 jobs spread across the economy is a welcome figure. The creation of new jobs will help to address poverty and fuel poverty, raise morale in the community and in the workforce, increase consumer spending and bring more much-needed confidence to the high street.

I welcome the fact that Ministers have asked for targets to be in line with their collective aspirations and that consultations have been widespread, including the business sector, the private sector and, of course, the community sector.

Delivery monitoring is key to the delivery and operational side of the Programme for Government. The programme will be managed by a Programme for Government board chaired by the First Minister and deputy First Minister and attended by the Finance Minister and head of the Civil Service. As regards delivery, the oversight group will be chaired by the head of the Civil Service and supported by the permanent secretaries group. For the operational side, Departments will create delivery plans, all of which will be published and scrutinised by Committees and the House.

I agree with the comment that the First Minister made earlier to the House when he said that Northern Ireland is one community and we must stop talking about this community as being a fragmented community of different parts. That completely undermines the concept of a shared future and a shared society.

I welcome the fact that Ministers and civil servants have listened to the criticisms of the draft Programme for Government. For too long, Northern Ireland has lagged behind the rest of the United Kingdom on reputation and perception. Of course, 40 years of terrorism has been a particular problem in selling this place nationally and internationally.

The Programme for Government will deal with victims. I attended an event earlier about people who have lost loved ones. We must never forget the absolute loss that some families have felt and continue to feel. We must never forget that cost, but there was also an opportunity cost in having to invest in security and military over the years, which meant that money could not be spent on other areas of the economy.

That has to be remembered and should not be forgotten.

#### 4.30 pm

Now, we can continue to invest in infrastructure for the future. I welcome the town and city regeneration bids, coupled with the progress in respect of rates and rates relief. Those are hugely important for small businesses.

As I mentioned earlier, the Programme for Government contains a commitment to promote 25,000 jobs, a commitment relating to £300 million investment in foreign direct investment and a commitment to press for the devolution of corporation tax. If the deal and the package are right for Northern Ireland, and if it does not undermine our block grant, the devolution of corporation tax is something that may well give a tremendous impetus to our local economy.

Reference was also made to social clauses. I know that the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister recently visited Crumlin Road jail. There are social clauses in place there, which allow local people to gain meaningful employment.

The commitment to increase the value of manufacturing exports is also to be welcomed. It is an area in which we must be aspirational and one that we must drive forward.

There is also support for a £300 million investment in research and development. Any company going out into the world market must always invest in research and development. It is hugely important to the company's success and its place in the world market.

The extension of the small business rate relief scheme is welcomed by small businesses across Northern Ireland. I have met with chambers of commerce, city centre management and small business owners in my constituency and the centre of Belfast who are very appreciative of that. Of course, holding the regional rate to an increase in inflation is also mentioned.

Reducing the number of councils in Northern Ireland to 11 will also reduce wastage.

The Department for Social Development's commitment to deliver 800 social and affordable homes is most welcome. Reducing fuel poverty across Northern Ireland through initiatives that include preventative measures is another most welcome step, as is the commitment to improve thermal efficiency in Northern Ireland Housing Executive stock. The full programme installation of PVC windows in Housing Executive housing stock is a welcome step, not least for those who live in those properties.

The delivery of at least 30 schemes to improve landscapes in public areas and to promote private sector investment in towns and cities will massively improve the streetscape of the cities and the aesthetic view to those who visit and shop there.

The establishment of an advisory group to assist Ministers in alleviating hardship is also to be welcomed.

With regard to OFMDFM, the provision of £40 million to address dereliction and to promote investment in physical regeneration in deprived areas through the social fund is to be welcomed. The investment of £40 million to improve pathways to employment, to tackle systematic issues linked to deprivation and to increase community services through the social investment fund is also to be welcomed. I know that Members across the House have mixed views on that. I have been working with many groups in my North Belfast constituency in trying to get them geared up to ensure that they and North Belfast benefit from that investment.

Members have to remember something that most Members said in their contributions. At our meeting of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister last week, we had some discussion about the previous Programme for Government. Interestingly, members did not talk about their own party's Departments; they talked about targets not being met by the various Ministers in the previous Programme for Government. What they did not mention was that in September 2008, the world's economy was hit by a massive economic tsunami and the economic slowdown. It is unfortunate that Members from the hokey-

cokey parties in the Executive — those who have a foot in and then a foot out, depending on what the issue is or what is being debated in the House — do not remember these things consistently. I think that that is extremely unfortunate.

**Mr D Kelly:** In 2007 and leading up to 2007 and 2008, the DUP was the master of hokey-cokey. It was in and out of the Executive Programme for Government. In remembering some of the past, it would do well to be a bit truthful about your own past.

**Mr Humphrey:** I think that you have made the salient point: we are the masters at it, not the apprentices. The fact of the matter is that the Tories and the Liberals and the contribution —

**Mr Allister:** That is called putting your foot in it.

**Mr Humphrey:** Does the Member want to make a point?

**Mr Allister:** I would be happy to. To say that you are the master of hokey-pokey is, I think, a demonstration of putting your foot in it. However, of course, it well fits the Member because, in 2007, he was one of those in the DUP who was opposed to bringing terrorists into government and heading in the direction that he is headed. Now, of course, he is a key cheerleader for it.

**Mr Humphrey:** I think —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. Maybe we could bring the hokey-pokey to an end.

**Mr Humphrey:** I actually said hokey-cokey.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member will be seated. All remarks must be made through the Chair, and it would be good if we could get back to the debate.

**Mr Humphrey:** Indeed. I am sorry for that, Mr Deputy Speaker, but you will remember that the Member for Upper Bann took us away from it.

With regard to social change, it is vital to build a shared future in shared space across Northern Ireland. Community confidence is vital. Therefore, I welcome many of the new proposals for Belfast, such as the Titanic Quarter; the World Police and Fire Games; the Tall Ships coming back to Belfast; the development of the Girdwood site; the north foreshore; sports stadia, including Windsor Park, which is hugely and urgently needed for the Northern Ireland supporters; the development and expansion of the Waterfront Hall; the Shankill cultural quarter and the cultural corridor in north Belfast. Seventy-six commitments demonstrating —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member will conclude his remarks.

**Mr Humphrey:** Do I not get an extra minute, Mr Deputy Speaker?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I am afraid not.

**Mr Humphrey:** I welcome the Programme for Government and I believe that it will take Northern Ireland forward. Let us keep Northern Ireland going forward. It is our future, our place, our time.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Chéad-Aire and the LeasChéad-Aire for bringing the Programme for Government to the House. It is a

key document and is the product of a lot of work by the Executive. It is not perfect but it shows that the Executive are a listening Executive.

Some of the general items that attract my support and interest are the inclusion of Sport Matters, which is the strategy for sport and physical recreation to make sure that more of our population takes part in sport and physical activity; the commitment to make the Education and Skills Authority operational by 2013; the delivery of the three major sports stadia; and the Irish language strategy, which I will select here as also being crucial.

I will speak now about a few issues relating to the Department for Employment and Learning. There are four specific Employment and Learning commitments in the Programme for Government, which are to:

*"Increase uptake in economically relevant Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics ... places ... Upskill the working age population by delivering over 200,000 qualifications ... Support people (with an emphasis on young people) in to employment by providing skills and training ... Ensure there are no increases in student fees beyond the rate of inflation for [local] students studying here".*

The introduction of tuition fees was a step that increased debt for students and their families and deterred many from disadvantaged and low income backgrounds from taking up higher education. Our party has always stated that it is totally unacceptable that the ability to pay for higher education has now become the benchmark for accessing educational opportunity. We firmly believe that a university campus should be a learning place not a marketplace. We believe that education is a basic right and that it must be based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay. I welcome the specific commitment that there will be no increases to student fees beyond the rate of inflation for local students here.

There are a number of other mentions of the Department for Employment and Learning. I want to add that I feel strongly that the education maintenance allowance (EMA) perhaps should have been mentioned in the Programme for Government. We have made a number of calls for the Minister for Employment and Learning to commit to the retention of the EMA. However, the Minister has so far failed to do that. I share the concerns of many young people who fear that there is an appetite for scrapping the allowance. It would be fundamentally wrong to do that. I want to highlight the fact that the EMA needs to be retained and directed at those areas of greatest need in the future.

I want to speak about my constituency of West Tyrone, and perhaps other areas in the north-west and west of the Bann. I specifically welcome the commitment in the Programme for Government to advance the relocation of the headquarters of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to a rural area by 2015. That is part of a wider agenda to ensure greater balance in subregional growth. I want to mention the A5 as being absolutely crucial to the north-west. I encourage the Executive to continue to use North/South links to help us to deliver on that priority. My colleague Pat Doherty MP dealt adequately with that in his contribution.

There needs to be investment in primary care infrastructure projects. In the near future, I would like to hear the Health Minister's thinking on investing in primary care infrastructure.

He has already spoken about it and promised creative funding approaches to ensure that more communities benefit from top-class primary care infrastructure. I have always taken the opportunity to highlight the needs of communities in West Tyrone, specifically Carrickmore and Fintona, for primary care infrastructure to meet the health requirements of local communities.

I also welcome the commitment to significantly progress work on the plan for the Lisanelly shared education campus as a key regeneration project. There is a commitment to develop the business case and plan for the new campus, secure further funding, initiate a development programme, complete the procurement process and embark on phase one of the construction. Those are some constituency-specific items that I wanted to highlight. I will leave it at that.

**Mr T Clarke:** When you are about the twenty-fourth Member to speak, it is difficult to find something to say that has not been covered already by some of my colleagues. Nonetheless, I welcome the Programme for Government. I listened to others being negative, and it is easy to be negative when they have nothing positive to bring. There are many positives in the Programme for Government. One day when the Committee took evidence from many of the different sectors involved with the Department, they pointed out some of the good aspects of it but continued to add a wish list. Listening to some Members today, it is difficult to imagine that we would have enough paper in the Assembly to print everything that they wished was in the document.

We are working with a much smaller budget than we had a number of years ago. Taking £4 billion out of the Budget means that it is harder to deliver the vision that we all may aspire to. However, if that money is not there, it makes it more difficult to get to that stage.

That aside, there have been many useful things. During the election last year when we were calling at doors, we discussed many meaningful things that affect the ordinary working-class person, particularly those living in Housing Executive houses who talked about double glazing. The Programme for Government states that all Housing Executive stock will be furnished with double-glazed windows. That is a positive outcome and something that those who have had to endure many cold winters without double glazing will find useful. Many Members talked about high-level parts of the document. However, we must not forget that when we rap on people's doors, should it be a pensioner or someone living on a very modest income, we must deliver something meaningful to them.

There is a promise in the Programme for Government that there will be no increase in student fees, and that has to be welcomed. Although water charges were mentioned previously, the Programme for Government states that there will be no additional charges. The theme running through it is that the Government are listening to the people and trying to effect change and make things less difficult in an economic climate where money is not so readily available.

While going round the doors, I spent much time listening to parents with young children saying how difficult it was to get childcare provision. Again, the Executive have listened to the people on the ground. The knock-on effect of that is that people will be able to get back into employment. There are young families who want to hold down full-time jobs but find

that difficult because of childcare provision. However, that issue has been addressed.

I also welcome the £80 million that has been committed to the Antrim area over the next three years from the social investment fund. There are blights on the landscape in Antrim that have been there for many years.

If communities can organise themselves to work together, there are opportunities around derelict buildings. There is upwards of £40 million there, so there are opportunities to put community projects together to try to restore some areas that have turned into blights on the landscape for many years.

#### 4.45 pm

**Mr Weir:** I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that dealing with derelict buildings goes beyond the pure economic benefit that can be clearly seen in employment in construction work, for example, and also has a very positive impact on increasing morale in those areas? An area can have a very downtrodden feeling that can be further dragged down by having derelict buildings there. They are an eyesore and they establish a culture or a feeling of neglect. The level of motivation can also go down in such areas. So, there are positive spin-offs, beyond the pure economic advantages of jobs, employment and investment, that can have a multiplier effect in the area as well.

**Mr T Clarke:** I agree. The first thing that springs to mind is the short-term economic benefit in securing jobs, but as the Member quite rightly said, that is only in the short term.

Nothing brings down the tone of an area like dereliction. I am thinking of the Ulster Bar corner in Antrim, which has been derelict for upwards of 25 years. That gives the impression that the town is not open for business, and that discourages investment there. The Member is quite right: although the Executive have made that amount of money available, let us hope that communities come together and make proposals to invest that money so that we can restore confidence there. When these buildings are restored, if investors want to look at particular areas, they will see that the area is open for business. All in all, I welcome the proposals in the Programme for Government and its endorsement today.

**Mr Eastwood:** There are some positive aspects to this Programme for Government, but, unfortunately, it is largely a disappointing document. I believe that every Government should be judged by their commitment to children and, in particular, their ability to deal with child poverty. Unfortunately, this Programme for Government rolls back from previous commitments to eradicate child poverty and singularly fails to set any independent target for the North of Ireland. That is not good enough. It is not good enough to simply follow the Tory Government's child poverty plan. We know the effects of successive Tory Governments' policies on our poorest children in the past.

On the subject of children, it is good to see a commitment to a childcare strategy. However, we have seen that commitment before and it has not been acted on to date. It is now time for action.

It is also clear that this Assembly's record on legislation has been nothing short of abysmal. There is no legislative

programme attached to this Programme for Government. In fact, the legislative output of this Assembly since the election last May has been less than half of that proposed by the Scottish Parliament. If devolved government is to instigate the kind of positive change promised and hoped for, it is imperative that Stormont significantly shifts its focus from the comfort of stability to the challenges of the realpolitik.

Legislative change, its instigation and scrutiny is a primary function of any Executive body and its linked legislature. Put simply, it is what politicians are elected to do. The clue is in the name: MLA — Member of the Legislative Assembly. If this Programme for Government is to substantively deliver for the people of the North, producing a legacy of robust, agreed legislation must be central to its ambition.

The document also fails entirely to address the past. There are some references to the ongoing work with victims and survivors, but the broader legacies of historical cases and themes contained within inquiries, coroners' courts and the ombudsman's office are totally neglected. The proposals of the victims' commissioners and the Eames/Bradley group are not given mention, nor is there any indication that they will be. Given the expense and political impact, not to mention the engrained and lasting hurt to victims, survivors and our societal makeup in general, this omission is one that needs to be highlighted.

There is also no mention of any strategy or framework for how the Executive will deal with forthcoming centenaries on the island. There is no commitment to engage with both Governments on the best mechanism to cohesively and maturely deal with our shared heritage, traditions and past. That needs to be rectified.

It is very welcome that Derry's One Plan is mentioned in the document. The Programme for Government gives a commitment to develop the plan. However, people need to know what that means. There are 11 catalytic projects in the One Plan, the most important and fundamental of which is the expansion of the Magee campus. However, the programme completely fails to deal with that issue. If the Executive are truly committed to balanced economic development, they must lift the cap on student numbers at Magee immediately. It is also notable that any reference to the Ilex regeneration company has been removed, and I would like to hear from OFMDFM whether there is any reason for that omission.

It is also worrying to learn that the Bain report on decentralisation has seemingly been left on the shelf. As a result of a series of ministerial questions that I tabled, it has been made clear to me that less than 5% of Northern Ireland Civil Service jobs are located in Derry, the second city, and that more than 60% of them are located in the greater Belfast area. There has been no attempt made in the programme to redress that imbalance. I welcome the commitment to develop —

**Mr Weir:** I thank the Member for giving way. We all want to see a fair distribution of jobs. However, in respect of the figures the Member quoted, does he accept that roughly 5% of the population live in the Foyle constituency and about 60% live in the greater Belfast area and that what we have, therefore, reasonably reflects the overall balance of the population?

**Mr Eastwood:** There is a very clear understanding that the Executive have only so many economic levers. However, one thing they can do very easily is to move a number of Departments or jobs around this part of the country. I welcome the commitment by the Agriculture Department. However, there is a major gap in the city of Derry and the surrounding areas in the north-west. If you look at the unemployment figures, Mr Weir, you will see very clearly that Derry has been left behind —

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

**Mr Eastwood:** — not only by successive British Governments but by successive Stormont Governments. I will move on.

I welcome the commitment to deliver a creative industries hub at Ebrington. Digital industries are at the core of Derry's balanced economic development, and that is central to the City of Culture project. I would also like to see the City of Culture receiving an injection of tourism advertisement similar to the very positive Your Time, Our Place campaign.

As a party, we are very disappointed at the lack of any real, tangible commitment to further enhance North/South integration in the Programme for Government. Unfortunately, the document does not go anywhere near far enough to address the real and urgent needs of our people. It is no longer good enough to see stability as success. From now on, success should be measured by delivery.

**Mr Dickson:** The Alliance Party is generally supportive of the Programme for Government that has been brought forward, and we will be supporting the motion. I would like to focus on the commitments around regional development and justice, and the overarching issues contained in both of them.

I begin by discussing the commitments in relation to sustainable public transportation. Northern Ireland needs effective and efficient transport infrastructure. That is important for local residents and workers and for the future development of the local economy. Transport is also a cross-cutting theme for all Departments, so a joined-up approach in that area is essential. Over the years, the Government have concentrated investment on roads infrastructure, which is important. However, that focus has helped to create the car-dependent society in which we live. There is an imbalance in the transport budget, with roads taking precedence to the detriment of an integrated and inclusive public transport network. That has contributed significantly to Northern Ireland having the highest carbon footprint in the United Kingdom. Emissions have not risen as a result of the transport sector alone. However, they have risen significantly in Northern Ireland, by nearly 40%.

That highlights the need not only to reduce car dependency but to have a joined-up approach to government and to how investment in public transport is connected intimately to other commitments in the Programme for Government, such as that under priority 3, through which the Executive said they will work towards a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Over-reliance on the private car also contributes to congestion and fuel poverty. I, therefore, welcome the commitment to spend some £500 million on more sustainable modes of transport. However, despite that investment, around only 14% of DRD's capital budget is being directed towards passenger transport, whereas the regional transportation strategy suggests that it ought to be in the region of 35%.

Even that latter figure is at odds with spending patterns in most European countries, which invest significantly more in their public transport infrastructure. Sadly, those who suffer most from underinvestment in public transport are, often, the most vulnerable: older, disabled and younger people, women and the unemployed. It is an issue not just of personal transport preferences or emissions but of equality.

I also have some concerns about how the £500 million is to be spent. For example, despite recent emphasis on the importance of active travel, in an answer to a written question from Mr Agnew, the Minister did not mention active travel schemes as part of that funding. Indeed, reference was made only to small sums of seed funding for sustainable transport initiatives. We need to do better if we are to truly promote more sustainable modes of transportation in Northern Ireland. Although I welcome the £500 million investment, as my party has noted, facilitating a major shift in travel behaviours will require significantly more investment. I hope that that £500 million can be built upon over the next few years as we move towards our next Programme for Government.

Similarly, we welcome the commitment to maintain 77 million passenger journeys per annum. In recognising the importance of public transport, it is most welcome that such a commitment is in the Programme for Government. However, that target has been in place since 2008. So, it does not reflect the commitment to a modal shift from car to public transport that we would all like to see.

There are immediate opportunities to cut waste and save money in the transport sector. My party has highlighted the lack of commitment to Departments working together to address a range of transport problems. Our transport resources are not used to their full potential. We need to sweat down those resources so that we can work more cleverly to create better solutions. We would like to have seen a commitment to DRD, DHSSPS and DE working together to conduct a cross-departmental review of transport strategy expenditure to identify the potential to share resources. Innovative solutions will save the three Departments money and create better access to transport for all. Although the opportunity for solid commitment to that in the Programme for Government has now passed, it is still possible for Departments to work together on that issue. My party would very much welcome that.

Staying on the theme of effective collaboration, I am disappointed to see that DRD is listed as the only Department to see through the commitment to create conditions to facilitate more walking and cycling to school when there is clearly a key role for the Department of Education in achieving that. It is also disappointing that no reference is made in that commitment to ensuring road safety for cyclists and pedestrians. Nevertheless, my party welcomes the commitment and hopes that we will see a real increase in the numbers of pupils who walk and cycle to school.

I welcome the allocation of an additional £68 million to water infrastructure. My party has long highlighted that our current water arrangements are unsustainable. Projected funding for the period up to 2021 is a cause of real concern, and it is imperative that action is taken swiftly to address governance arrangements for Northern Ireland Water. Although we pay for some of the cost of water and sewerage services as part of the regional rate, those contributions

do not cover the full cost of running the service. The level of payment is considerably lower than that which people elsewhere in the United Kingdom pay. It costs us some £200 million each year. It is not funded through the block grant, so money is directed from other public services to cover the subsidy. The result is that people are already paying through underinvestment in other areas, such as hospitals and schools.

It is, therefore, the less well off and the more vulnerable who depend most on our public services and the failure to cover the cost of water service delivery hits them disproportionately. Although that extra investment is welcome, we need to think seriously about the future governance arrangements for our water.

### 5.00 pm

I now turn to the subject of justice. I welcome the justice commitments, in particular the commitment to reduce the number of interface structures. My party has a vision of a cohesive, shared and integrated society. Creating a shared future is one of the greatest challenges facing Northern Ireland, which remains characterised by territory and public space that is marked out by exclusive symbols. Recently, however, with an Alliance Party Justice Minister in place, we have seen interface structures opened. Community dialogue and consultation have been vital to that development, and we are happy to see engagement with communities enshrined in the Programme for Government. If we are to create a shared future for all, continuing along that path is imperative.

*(Mr Speaker in the Chair)*

Perhaps the greatest challenge that we face in the area of justice is in getting effective collaboration and joined-up working with other Departments. Too often, other Departments fail to intervene early enough to tackle problems, and the Department of Justice is wrongly held responsible and has to pick up the pieces. The Alliance Party has argued for a long time that when it comes to justice issues, all other Departments have an important role to play. My party colleagues Mr Ford and Dr Farry have demonstrated what can be achieved when Departments work together. For example, the new Donard Centre at Maghaberry reflects cross-departmental responsibility for prisoner rehabilitation and recognises the role that DEL and DHSSPS must play in dealing with vulnerable prisoners.

As I finish, I reiterate that the Alliance Party is supportive of the Programme for Government and will support the motion. We are pleased that the need for collaborative working and joined-up government were given more emphasis in the final document, but it is disappointing that an opportunity was missed to include more about early intervention. The Alliance Party would like to see the principles of joined-up government, early intervention and creating a shared future assuming even greater primacy in the programme.

**Mr McGlone:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is useful to have this debate and to focus on the priorities and the issues that really count. The Programme for Government is our way forward. It is about our and our young people's futures. Far too many of us have been in too many houses over the last wee while and have heard about young people day and daily leaving our shores to go to Australia. There is a huge onus and responsibility on the Assembly and the

Executive to offer an alternative and a pathway to young people and, as I will highlight as I go through the tenets and tones of my speech, to the most vulnerable people in our society in particular. The Programme for Government does not address those key elements; there is not enough substantial detail in it on that. There are elements that are welcome, but there are others that show that not enough thought or focus have been given to the way forward, or to creating a safety cushion for those who are continually in the extreme situations and have fallen on hard times.

We broadly agree with the five key priorities in the Programme for Government. Some of those are indeed priorities, but others are vague and their nature and the key commitments show that targets seem to be absent. Indeed, that theme has been repeated in the Assembly this evening. There should be clear targets and commitments for delivery, with each Department having clear responsibilities and accountability. The Programme for Government lacks ambition and innovation on the part of the Executive on those matters, and that needs to be said. I am not being negative; I am making a statement of fact that has been repeated by many sectors and stakeholders outside this Building. As I do, they want to see the Executive and the Assembly doing well, but, more importantly, they want to see them doing well for our young people and our society.

We want to see devolution that is meaningful, that is different from direct rule, and that delivers for our people, particularly in our rebalancing the economy. We know the problems that the economy faces and the difficulties that exist. People who have become unemployed for the first time are coming to our doors and they are looking to the Assembly to deliver, rebalance and rebuild.

That, nevertheless, presents us with an opportunity and a challenge. For example, when it comes to tax-varying powers, we welcome the fact that there is some intent to press for a reduction in corporation tax. However, it is a very long drawn-out process that seems to appear one day and disappear the next, with very little detail being worked out either by the Treasury or the Executive. There are a lot of businesses that look to that as but one element of a recovery for the North and, indeed, for this island. They want to see measures being delivered and worked through between us and, in this instance, the British Treasury to start creating jobs for our community and to give us hope.

We need to make sure that it is not entirely a win-win for the Treasury that allows it to say that we can reduce our block grant while at the same time it takes the receipts from PAYE. That is for the detailed negotiation, but it is exactly that detail and those key elements that people want to hear more about. I recently attended meetings with businesses, and those are exactly the questions that they are posing to me and have asked me to relay here. It can be included in the Programme for Government, but we want to hear about a bit more focus.

It is good to see capital investment projects in the Programme for Government. I welcome the commitment to the police and emergency services college and to hospital projects in various parts of the North. That is good, because projects such as those and roads projects will help to sustain and support existing businesses. On that note, I want to refer specifically to job creation. The Programme for Government contains a commitment to move 114,000 working-age

benefit clients into employment. Frankly, that is the bit that I do not get. I do not know where the employment is into which to move those people, nor is it clear where or how those 114,000 positions are to be made available for people to move into. I hope that the document is not just smoke and mirrors. I hope that there is a commitment to have 114,000 positions available for those people. However, that is entirely unclear from the commitment and from the document.

I turn to the issue of raising additional finance. There are some areas on which we had hoped to get more detail. For example, on the creation of a local investment bond to raise money for school building and on aiming to expand local government borrowing to fund community development projects, and even on an infrastructure bank to finance large public building projects. Those are the things that we would like to hear about.

The draft Programme for Government commits to modernising our energy provision through increased or accelerated investment in renewables and the green economy. I want to hear more detail on the green new deal, because many people have very high hopes for it. At one level, it will reduce health budget expenditure on cold-related illnesses and deal with elements of climate change, making it cheaper for people, particularly elderly and vulnerable people, to live in their own homes, while at the same time creating jobs. That aspect of the green new deal is not being teased out properly. I realise that some cross-departmental work has been carried out, but that is what we need to see and that is the hope that people want to hear about from our Executive.

I turn now to North/South co-operation. I attended a very successful conference on Thursday, which was organised by my party and addressed by the Minister in the South, Simon Coveney, who showed how his Department is working on the agrifood sector and has within its total grasp the detailed issues that need to be dealt with to expand that sector to help it to grow and be nurtured even further. I also attended a meeting with the Quarry Products Association on Thursday evening, at which the Ulster Bank's chief economist, Richard Ramsey, showed us that the agriculture sector has grown by 20%. I would have liked to have seen the best resources in both parts of this island, particularly in that sector, being more manifest on North/South co-operation in the Programme for Government.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Does the Member share my disappointment that given that the milk quota will be lifted in 2013, there is no commitment to an all-island strategy for the dairy sector to take advantage of the opportunities that that will present?

**Mr McGlone:** I thank the Member for making that point. Minister Coveney highlighted that potential and those options in very positive way. We could learn a number of lessons, and I would welcome increased North/South co-operation, not to make a particular party political point but because it makes sense for our people, who want investment in jobs, and it makes sense for many of our young people who are now attending Queen's University, which is becoming vastly oversubscribed in that area. That is the hope that they want to see, as they want a future for themselves and for their families.

On the tourism front, we welcome the commitment to increased visitor numbers and tourist spend in the North

but we are concerned to see some more detail in the draft Programme for Government to expand on that pledge.

I will move to the social protection fund and a welfare reform mitigation fund. The SDLP welcomes the fact that the draft Programme for Government refers to the social protection fund as an annual fund. It has to be recognised that the North's Budget provided funding for the social protection fund for only one financial year. That was money that was previously spent on fuel payments. We have to look at that. I am anxious to see whether there is any move or transition to bury the overall social fund in the social protection fund, which includes dealing with child poverty, childcare issues, employment support and preschool education. I was disappointed to hear from the Minister for Social Development that he had ruled out a form of support for people in mortgage debt.

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

**Mr McGlone:** That would help to ease a situation for an awful lot of people in our society, and I was disappointed that it was not there.

**Mr Speaker:** Time is up.

**Mr McGlone:** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I could have said much more, obviously.

**Mr Allister:** I am sure that our constituents, who sent us here 10 months ago, will be very grateful and impressed that, 10 months later, the Government that were then installed have got around to a Programme for Government. It is not much of a record, is it? Yet today, OFMDFM, as brash and bold and boastful as ever, presents its Programme for Government as if it is what we have all been waiting for — the panacea, the answer to all our problems. Of course, on cue, all its ingratiating acolytes have been on their feet to tell it about the wonderful job that it has been doing.

OFMDFM was not quite as available when it had to sneak out a written statement to concede how few of the targets of the previous Programme for Government it actually met, how one third of those were never met and how 44% of its key goals and commitments were not met. OFMDFM was not so loud and boastful then. It slipped out a little written statement and did not even come to the House to talk about it. It is against that background and in that context that I and, I believe, many of my constituents will judge this document. It will be judged against the fact that the previous Administration, which was made up of the same people, produced a Programme for Government that they littered with failure to meet their own targets and their own key ambitions. Therefore, why should anyone think that the same people will do anything different this time and that this Programme for Government will not become another testament to the failure of this dysfunctional form of government that is inflicted on us? I, for one, certainly do not expect its outcome to be any different.

#### 5.15 pm

This document is glossy, nicely produced and looks very well. If you simply flick through it, you will say, "Yes, that looks good". However, its content is utterly vague and vacuous. Of course, it is not really there to secure delivery but to tick a box and say, "Didn't we produce a nice Programme for Government? Yes, it might have taken us 10



months, but we are very busy people, you know. We have all sorts of places to go and all sorts of people to meet. We really are so busy that you cannot expect us to do better than produce a Programme for Government in 10 months. Do not look too hard at how we failed the last time because none of that was our fault, you know. We are the victim of circumstances. Yes, we are in government, but we cannot really control anything.” And so the retinue of excuses rolls out.

When I look at the state of our health service, I wonder where some of our government Ministers are hiding. Do they listen to the accounts of people such as an 86-year-old woman who waited on a trolley for 34 hours apparently having had a stroke in Antrim hospital with no provision, no attendance to her and no help for her? That is replicated time after time. Why? Because we have a policy of running down the health service.

A year ago, there was a hapless Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who was ridiculed at every turn and told that he was failing and not producing. That was not because he had no money, because, we were told, there was loads of money for Mr McGimpsey. Yet, now that those who made those charges are in office, we have shambles written over our health service. Why? Because we have the closure at Belfast City Hospital. Oh sorry, that was only temporary, we were told. No one believed that, and it will prove to be otherwise. Now the Royal cannot cope. Now the same Minister wants to inflict the same thing on my constituency in North Antrim by running down the acute services in the Causeway Hospital and channelling much of them into an already overstretched Antrim hospital that is not coping.

This Government's record on basic provision on things such as health is one of abject, lamentable failure, and there is nothing in this Programme for Government that will improve anything at all in that regard. All my constituency can look forward to is the running down of the Causeway Hospital and all the negative ramifications of that.

They tell us, “Oh, we are short of money”. They are not so short of money that they cannot spend £5 million on their spin doctor departments. They are not so short of money that they cannot spend £4.5 million on hospitality. They are not so short of money — you could hardly make this up — when they have recently signed a contract for £400,000 with photographers to take photographs of them. It is such vanity and such farce that we have in government those who think that it is more important to have a contract with photographers to take their photographs so as they might smile out of the newspaper at us and us pay for the privilege than to attend to and fix our health service. That, in many ways, says it all.

Then we come to this Programme for Government. You could take many subjects, but let me take the issue of upcoming events. We were all glad to hear that in 2013, the city of Londonderry is to be the United Kingdom City of Culture. Yet, in this document, that fact is sanitised out. It is now just the City of Culture.

I am sorry: its correct title is the United Kingdom City of Culture. Why do we have a Government that cannot even use the proper title? Of course, it is because there are those in this Government who veto and who will not allow the proper title to be used, and then there are those who toady and go

along with it. That is why, in the Programme for Government, it is the City of Culture instead of its proper title.

That is why, according to the Programme for Government, we are now to have the Maze project proceed, with £18 million to create a conflict resolution centre built around the ugly, disreputable buildings of the Maze prison. It is to enable people, such as the Member for Foyle Mr Raymond McCartney, to boast, a week or two ago, in respect of the project, that the listed and retained buildings, including an H Block, the prison hospital, the visitors' and administration blocks, will be open to the public and that there will be the opportunity for the many stories of the jail to be told. Then there are those who try to tell their constituents that building the conflict transformation centre has nothing to do with pleasing Sinn Féin, nothing to do with recapturing and retaining the prison buildings at the Maze, and that they will be totally separate. They will not be so separate that Mr McCartney does not anticipate using them to tell the IRA's story of the Troubles, and what a distortion that will be.

If we need a conflict transformation centre, I ask a very simple question that I have asked before: why put it in a place where it will be tainted by the history of that place, where there are IRA citadel buildings that will taint its every dimension? If we need one, why is it not on a greenfield site? It is simple, of course: Sinn Féin will not allow it to be anywhere else, and what Sinn Féin wants, Sinn Féin gets.

**Mr McNarry:** You could get into a row very easily in this place. [*Laughter.*] I am not so sure of the acolyte syndrome, but, suffered or not, I am a committed devolutionist, and I welcome the genuine good intentions and commitments that I see made today by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister in their presentation of the Executive's Programme for Government. They bring forward challenges and a primary focus for the next four years on growing our economy and tackling disadvantage. They have set the bar high for themselves and for those who share in that view of what we can attain and aspire to do.

In the best of times, people would be restless, but in continued difficult times, I see it as a spirited rallying call to our citizens, emphasising what I think they want to hear: that they are foremost in our minds here in the Assembly, charged with the duties that we have. Capturing the needs of the people should be matched with embracing their uncertainties and some of the depth of despair over hardships. Therefore, in order to win support for what is being proposed and to instil confidence in anticipation of the new shoots of better times ahead, let us inform people that preparations are already in place to replace disadvantage with advantage. In doing so, let us also demonstrate confidence in ourselves by pulling together to sell this ambitious programme in a manner that resonates with the people.

Earlier, I listened to the Chair of the Education Committee pull no punches in his concerns that there is still much more clarity to be given on the direction that education is taking and, indeed, where it might end up. In my opinion, today's Programme for Government falls short both of direction and outcome where the expectations of parents, pupils and teaching staff are concerned. I welcome the commitments that are given on preschool education, STEM places, raising attainments by school-leaving time, participation in shared education, and, in particular, the involvement of ministerial advisory groups. Those will, of course, make a difference,

but I suggest to the House that there is not four years to think about school closures or mergers or the unacceptable school-leaving qualifications of young Protestants, which is a matter that is plaguing this society. Those are serious issues that parents, pupils and teachers attempt to cope with all too regularly.

This may be implicit in what the First Minister and deputy First Minister are thinking, and I should be fair to the Education Minister's position as he strives to resolve these issues. However, more delivery on these issues is necessary to enable the Executive to take credit for improvements in education and to show that they have the confidence to sell the way forward. If that confidence does not permeate out from this House to the people, this exercise is nearly void. We are here to listen, criticise and respect criticism, but if we do not get the message out there, we are failing in our duties. I believe that people out there want to hear what we have to say, but they also say, "Go for it; take us through this. Show us how we get through it." I think that parents and pupils want to hear that message about education loud and clear. It would demonstrate that the Assembly sees the investment in our children's future as a top five priority and that it goes beyond the scope that it has set.

I use this opportunity to inject a plea urging us to sprint forward to making our schools estate available for the community at large for full and best use. I urge a commercial mentality in thinking through how bricks-and-mortar, let alone hard-cash, assets can be valued in real terms so that many hard-pressed communities can benefit.

As I suggested, the importance of what is being said in the commitments that I read cannot be allowed to pass the people by. That message — our message — will be better understood by selling the priorities and commitments and by bringing the people with us. I suggested that we need to ask people to buy in to our optimism and our abilities to keep Northern Ireland working. The job is to keep us working and to create that future for the young people. I wish the Executive well but I ask them to show us the effort over the next four years. That is what we all need to see.

**Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister):** I listened carefully to the points that were made during the debate. It is a powerful testament to the Assembly that we are able to discuss the Programme for Government so openly and, at times, passionately. As the debate demonstrated, we do not always agree on the approach to be taken on various policy issues. However, I believe that everyone here agrees on the need for a comprehensive programme of reform, the need for real delivery on the ground and the need to look forward to a brighter tomorrow by investing our efforts, talents and goodwill today.

I think that we have a lot to be hopeful about. Last week, the First Minister and I were very fortunate to see Terry and Orlagh George's Oscar-winning film 'The Shore'.

It is a stunning example of the way in which we can capitalise on the power of the creative industries based here. It is an example of how we have everything to gain and nothing to lose by working together. In essence, it is a reflection of our journey from conflict to peace. We should never take for granted the magnitude of our journey and how we in the North of Ireland can be a beacon of hope in a world dominated by war and conflict. 'The Shore' is an

example of how, when we speak with our creativity and our hard work, the world listens. It is not an isolated example but one in a series of recent happenings that prove that we are moving forward decisively.

### 5.30 pm

Earlier, the First Minister listed events that will take place in 2012, events of tremendous international historical and cultural interest. I have no doubt that the opening of the new arts centre, the opening of the Titanic visitors' centre, the arrival of the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race in Derry and all the other events planned in Our Time, Our Place will be a great success. They will have a direct impact, attracting much-needed tourism for our economy and, as importantly, and drive it home again and again that we can compete with anywhere else in the world when it comes to our heritage, hospitality and humour.

Of course, it is not enough to assume that the creativity and talent of our people alone will bring us through the economic and fiscal challenges that we face as a result of the global credit crisis and subsequent downturn. We need a plan, and it needs to be good. Having consulted widely on the Programme for Government and listened to the debate, we feel that it is clear that people want and need us to support them in creating a better future for themselves, their families and their communities. That is why we need to move beyond rhetoric and debate and into delivery that people can experience at first hand. The Programme for Government is our opportunity to set a course towards prosperity, health and well-being for everyone, including those who feel isolated and excluded. We have the tremendous privilege of being able to agree a plan that will transform our society and make it a place where people want to live, not just during the course of this Programme for Government but for many decades to come. On 17 November last year, I stated:

*"we collectively ... need to raise our game ... to improve the economy." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 68, p385, col 1].*

I believe that to be as true now as it was then. We need ambition and aspiration, and I make no apologies for saying that.

People may sometimes confuse the drive to achieve equality with a desire to reduce the ambitions of those who want to succeed. Nothing could be further from the truth. We need to find a way to ensure that everyone feels that they can succeed in life, particularly children and young people living in poverty. Our efforts need to focus on lifting their sights and helping them to make the very best of their potential. So, equality and economy are not incompatible — quite the opposite. To put it simply, inequalities prevent people contributing their energies and talents. That is why we need an economy that supports everyone, from a single parent in the Short Strand or the Shankill to the teenager in Fintona or the Bogside. A vibrant economy based on private sector investment will be the route out of poverty for many people, families and communities.

The draft Programme for Government included a stretching commitment to produce 25,000 jobs. It is crucial that we achieve that ambitious level of job creation. The current version of the programme also sets out £1 billion of investment to support that, including £375 million from foreign direct investment, £400 million from indigenous

businesses supported by Invest NI and £225 million as a result of the jobs fund. In addition to the new and enhanced commitments to the increased drawdown of EU funding and increased manufacturing exports, the Programme for Government before us today includes further commitments that will directly or indirectly impact on the economy. Many Members commented on those new commitments, and I am pleased that they received a broad welcome. They include support for 200 projects through the creative industries innovation fund; the development of sports stadia, as agreed with the IFA, GAA and Ulster Rugby; an extension of the small business rate relief scheme to 2015; investment in social enterprise growth; an investment of £40 million to address dereliction and promote investment in the physical regeneration of deprived areas through the social investment fund; an investment of £40 million to improve pathways to employment, tackle systemic issues linked to deprivation and increase community services through the social investment fund; and increasing young people's uptake of places in economically relevant science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses.

It is also clear that people want us to focus on the needs of the most vulnerable, and we have listened. Several Members have commented on the importance of the Executive working in a more joined-up manner. The Delivering Social Change framework is a tangible example of that and represents a direct response to the consultation, which identified the requirement to address the needs of a range of groups in society, including people from ethnic minority backgrounds, children, people with disabilities and victims and survivors. Through that framework, we will ensure that Departments concentrate on a small number of focused actions that can really make a difference: early interventions, parenting, family support, childcare and social enterprise.

We recognise that people have a wide range of needs and want to see them reflected in our plans and priorities. We also recognise that strategies that promise everything sometimes deliver little or nothing, so it is our clear intention to develop a single, coherent action plan that will address the needs of children and young people, tackle multigenerational poverty and improve people's life opportunities. Other examples include commitments to initiatives aimed at reducing fuel poverty; improving the thermal efficiency of Housing Executive stock and ensuring full double glazing; publishing and implementing a childcare strategy with key actions to provide integrated and affordable childcare; and using the social protection fund to help individuals and families facing hardship due to the current economic downturn.

**Mr Byrne:** I thank the deputy First Minister for giving way. It is fair to say that the Programme for Government outlines a long series of objectives and targets, and that is to be welcomed. Will the deputy First Minister state whether he and the First Minister are content with the way that the Senior Civil Service operates and how it governs and administers Northern Ireland? Given that we have had 40 years of direct rule, it is crucial that we have reform of the most senior levels of the Civil Service to make sure that the political dynamic can attain the objectives that have been outlined.

**Mr M McGuinness:** Many Assembly Members and Ministers in this Administration have, over the years, had all sorts of debates and discussions about the support that we receive from the Civil Service and the quality of leadership that we have had. Some people have been critical, others

complimentary. The First Minister and I recognise the importance of ensuring that there is a good working relationship between us as politicians and the Civil Service. The Civil Service realises, with regard to the governance of this place through the Executive, that we are in charge. We are the politicians; it is our job to give leadership, and that we have done. We recently appointed a new head of the Civil Service, who is working very positively and constructively with the First Minister and me. I have no doubt whatsoever that there is a very deep appreciation within the Civil Service, from which we receive tremendous support, that we need to move forward together.

It is worth noting, in respect of the social protection fund, which I just mentioned, that we are issuing fuel payments to some 250,000 people this year.

I now turn to some of the points made during the debate. Rebalancing the economy came up, and, understandably, many Members addressed that issue, which is central to the Programme for Government. Tom Elliott, Conor Murphy, Phil Flanagan, Patsy McGlone and Margaret Ritchie raised the specific issue of corporation tax and progress on our negotiations with the British Government. I attended a meeting last week at the Treasury along with the First Minister, the Finance Minister and the Enterprise Minister. We left the Treasury in no doubt of the importance and urgency of devolving those powers. We will continue to press hard for a solution that benefits all the people of the North.

**Mr McCarthy:** I am grateful to the deputy First Minister for giving way. Not so long ago, your Finance Minister, in response to a question when he was over there, was anything but enthusiastic about corporation tax coming to Northern Ireland. In fact, I think that he said that he was a unionist. Does the deputy First Minister acknowledge that his Finance Minister is on board?

**Mr M McGuinness:** We have shown over recent times that we have a very united Executive and Assembly in relation to desiring the devolution of corporation tax powers to our Administration. People are entitled to their views on what is a very important matter. However, this is not about politics; it is about how we get people jobs and attract foreign direct investment.

The First Minister and I have seen, as a result of successful forays to the United States of America, that in recent years we have brought in more foreign direct investment jobs — thousands of new jobs — than at any other time in the history of the Northern state. So a key commitment that we have enhanced as a result of the consultation that we are involved in is a £1 billion investment that includes £375 million in foreign direct investment, £400 million from indigenous businesses and £225 million as a result of the jobs fund. It is important to stress that that is primarily additional private sector investment that our Programme for Government will stimulate.

Tom Elliott, Chris Lyttle, Colum Eastwood and Dolores Kelly, among others, raised the issue of the legislative programme. Although the Programme for Government is much broader than a legislative programme, legislation will be a key element in its delivery. The legislative programme will flow naturally from key commitments in the Programme for Government, and we are looking at options for bringing it to the Assembly.

The issue of welfare reform commitments was raised by Alex Maskey, Chris Lyttle, Dolores Kelly and Mark Durkan. They raised points about the impact of welfare reform on people in the North. As Members are aware, those are Westminster Government proposals, and there is a high degree of concern about them, which we share. We have a responsibility as an Executive to protect people, particularly the most vulnerable, from any potential negative impact. We will do what we can to mitigate the worst aspects of the reforms through the work of the welfare advisory group, for example.

The issue of child poverty was raised by Dolores Kelly, Colum Eastwood and Mark Durkan. Of course, we need to have specific targets on child poverty, but targets are important only in driving delivery. The Delivering Social Change programme is important because it will support a single policy framework to address children's issues, child poverty and wider poverty issues. That will, of course, lead to targets that are real, well informed and deliverable.

The issue of Maze/Long Kesh came up. That development is hugely important for regeneration, peace building and conflict resolution. We will take forward the project carefully and with great sensitivity. However, there are Members who seem determined to make political capital out of what is a positive and economically advantageous project, not only for the community in Lagan Valley but for all of us. Is Tom Elliott seriously suggesting that we refuse £18 million of European funding for a project that shows how we as a society have moved on from conflict to peace? I am amazed at the attitude of the Ulster Unionist Party. I am amazed because I have repeatedly made it clear that it will be a shrine to peace, peace building and conflict resolution. We know that there is intense interest throughout the world in how we moved from conflict to peace. People are interested in coming here, and it has been clearly established that many people will travel to our shores in the aftermath of the construction of that building so that they can learn from our experiences. This is not about political one-upmanship or telling one side of the story over another; it is about being inclusive. I am shocked and surprised that people such as Mike Nesbitt and others do not appreciate the importance of that.

#### 5.45 pm

**Mr Nesbitt:** I thank the Minister for giving way. Does he accept that one of the difficulties is that, within the Protestant, unionist, loyalist community, the danger is not only lack of support because of the venue of the centre but the likelihood of alternative centres being built, taking away from the central point of having one repository?

**Mr M McGuinness:** Given the history of the project, it has been clearly shown that, in the beginning, your party was very enthusiastic about the project. I am at a loss to understand why that enthusiasm has been lost. I can only consider that the Ulster Unionist Party thinks that this is a useful point to try to score over the Democratic Unionist Party. I commend the Democratic Unionist Party for holding its nerve on this issue. One thing that, I think, I have managed to convince its members of is that we on this side of the House have no intention of letting them or anybody else down in relation to how we, with great sensitivity, handle the project. This project, along with the relocation of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society and all the attendant operations that will come into play in what will probably be

the most important investment site on the whole island of Ireland, is something that we need to develop into a place where we can bring great numbers of people. That will greatly enhance the economic prospects of the people not just of Lagan Valley but of the whole of the North.

**Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):** Is it not the case that it was the Ulster Unionist Party chairman — the current chairman, as I understand it — who made the proposal for the Maze/Long Kesh site? Is the putative future leader of the Ulster Unionists now contradicting his party chairman?

**Mr M McGuinness:** Far be it from me to cause any friction within the Ulster Unionist Party. I think that it has enough to deal with over the next couple of weeks.

William Irwin mentioned his concern that our commitment to the new stadiums is Belfast-centred. I remind the Member that the decisions were made by the individual sporting bodies of soccer and rugby and by the GAA, not by our Executive.

Reporting and monitoring delivery, which is of huge importance, came up. A significant number of Members raised the issue of how the delivery of PFG 2011-15 will be achieved and how cross-departmental working will be delivered. Delivery and outcomes are key priorities for the First Minister and me. Delivery plans, which will set out in more detail how each of the commitments will be delivered, including key milestones and indicators, will be at the heart of this. It is important to say that this is a new departure in monitoring progress against the Programme for Government. For the first time, we have a relatively small number of commitments, and we are asking Departments to produce detailed plans to demonstrate how they will achieve those commitments. This will improve accountability and, importantly, will offer the opportunity for earlier intervention where delivery slips.

The Programme for Government is predicated on the expectation that Departments will work together to achieve its outcomes. We intend to use the monitoring and management structures for the PFG to ensure that this co-operation occurs. For example, with the Delivering Social Change initiative, Ministers will direct cross-governmental action on children in poverty in a more comprehensive and systematic way.

The issue of social clauses was raised by Conor Murphy, Dolores Kelly, Mark Durkan and William Humphrey. I am happy to support the implementation of social clauses, as are the entire Executive. We need to have clear and consistent definitions, guidance and roll-out of social clauses, so we must do everything we can to ensure that investment benefits everyone in the community.

Social and affordable housing was raised by Alban Maginness. Alban made an important point in relation to the potential for newbuild housing to stimulate not only the construction industry but the wider economy.

Anna Lo and Danny Kinahan raised important points about the environment, including climate change and, in particular, waste. There is a need to ensure that we reduce, reuse and recycle waste where possible. The commitments in the Programme for Government should be seen as flagships to focus efforts on delivery. There is nothing to stop the Department of the Environment going beyond the recycling,

biodiversity and climate change targets. Indeed, I ask all Departments to develop broad business plans that include but are not limited to the Programme for Government commitments.

Health came up, and a number of Members raised the importance of health and health services. Many commitments in the Programme for Government will impact directly on this issue. There is a close correlation between deprivation and poor health. We need to tackle the root causes of ill health and help people to overcome poor health, particularly long-term or chronic conditions. Public health, chronic condition management and helping people to stay out of hospital will be critical.

George Robinson raised the issue of planning decisions on major projects. That is a critical measure in improving the competitiveness of our economy. What is required of a fit-for-purpose planning system is responsible, sustainable decision-making in a sensible time frame.

A range of Members acknowledged the importance of education in the Programme for Government. There was a broad welcome for the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority. Barry McElduff highlighted the importance of higher and further education and listed a number of commitments in the Programme for Government. I fully recognise the importance of these issues. Education is central to improving the life opportunities of children and young people. I am grateful to the Member for raising the Lisanelly campus project. The First Minister and I are convinced that it could be a model of high-quality education provision, with schools working in partnership across sectors and in all parts of the community.

Colum Eastwood raised the issue of references to Ilex. It is important to state that the final programme, like the draft programme, has several very tangible commitments to Derry, including development and support for the One Plan and financial support for the City of Culture. Ilex will be the first to recognise the importance of those commitments and the fact that no single organisation could hope to deliver them on its own. The Programme for Government is about people and outcomes, not lists of organisations.

Danny Kinahan and Stewart Dickson raised the issue of progress on CSI, which is central to our future as a society. It affects all aspects of social policy, and we are committed to addressing it. Therefore, as we reported earlier, we have established a cross-party working group to take the issue forward quickly on the basis of an agreed agenda. We will, of course, keep the House closely informed of progress.

Pat Doherty raised the issue of water infrastructure. We are pleased to have been able, in the current version of the Programme for Government, to increase investment from £600 million to £667 million. The Member referenced the important work to be done on reviewing the governance of Northern Ireland Water and the benefits that that will have for efficiency in that organisation. We agree, and we will make what improvements we can in that area.

Paul Givan and William Humphrey raised the issue of so-called peace walls. We acknowledge the impact and effect of those walls on our communities. It is a very complex issue. We will work to resolve the issues connected to the physical barriers in our communities in consultation with the communities

that are most affected. Those who live on either side of the barriers must be central to any process of change.

Alban Maginness referred to the absence of any mention of the green new deal in the Programme for Government and raised concerns about our commitment to Europe. I remind the Member that the current four-year Budget contains provision for the green new deal initiative. In addition, the Programme for Government contains commitments to significant programmes of investment in energy efficiency and to targets to make further rapid progress on renewable energy expansion and, thereby, contribute to a strong sustainable economy. I also point to the Programme for Government commitment to draw down an initial 20% of EU funding over the coming period. Work is already under way on that target.

On North/South co-operation, I point Members to our commitment in the document to the importance of North/South links in helping us to deliver our priorities and to our commitment to developing those links through day-to-day contact between Administrations as well as formal structures such as the North/South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council. We have stated that we will work closely with the Irish Government in ways that are mutually advantageous.

I take this opportunity to assure Members of our commitment to retain free travel for older people.

On the point about whether or not we have consulted properly, I remind Members that the consultation process included over 430 consultation responses and 20 meetings with over 400 people. We have five brand new commitments: to facilitate the delivery of the Executive's 20% target for increased drawdown of competitive EU funds; to develop and implement a strategy to reduce economic inactivity through skills, training incentives and job creation; to introduce a package of measures aimed at improving safeguarding outcomes for children and vulnerable adults; to implement new structures to support the improved delivery of housing services to citizens; and to develop and implement a financial capability strategy for consumers. In addition, there have been significant enhancements to a number of commitments and improvements to many milestones. Among those are commitments to £1 billion investment in the economy; an increase in the value of manufacturing exports to 20% from 15%; an increase in visitor numbers to 4.2 million from 3.6 million; an increase in tourist revenue to £676 million from £625 million; and support for the successful hosting of the 2012 Irish Open and to build on that success to secure a further international golf event.

At this point, I want to echo the First Minister's thanks to the OFMDFM Committee. We also made a point of analysing the input from consultees throughout the process and provided regular reports to the Committee. That was good discipline, which, we believe, paid dividends in assisting the Committee to fulfil its scrutiny role. I thank the Committee for all its work in that regard.

Obviously, people will be keenly interested in how the Assembly votes on the Programme for Government in the next few minutes. However, I want to put it on record that I am surprised and disappointed that SDLP Minister Alex Attwood could not find it in himself to attend last Thursday's crucial Executive meeting, which unanimously supported the

Programme for Government. It also saddens me to say that I find it equally surprising that the leader of the SDLP, Alasdair McDonnell, could not —

**Mrs D Kelly:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is totally disingenuous of the deputy First Minister to criticise the Minister of the Environment. He was in Brussels on official business.

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Bell:** Further to that point of order, I thought that the Minister of the Environment told us that he was at a funeral. Was he at a funeral or was he in Brussels?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Allow the deputy First Minister to continue.

**Mr M McGuinness:** I reiterate that it was a crucial meeting of the Executive to decide their approach to the Programme for Government, and I find it surprising and disappointing that the Minister of the Environment absented himself from that meeting. I wonder why. I also find it equally surprising —

**Mr D Bradley:** Will the deputy First Minister give way?

**Mr M McGuinness:** No, I will not give way. I find it equally surprising that the leader of the SDLP, Alasdair McDonnell, could not find the time to come to the Assembly today and contribute to our discussions on an issue that his party says it feels very strongly about. I know that the Ulster Unionists are about to decide who will be their next leader, but I have to say that I think the SDLP suffers from a leadership deficit. Such negativity from the SDLP towards the Executive is not lost on the electorate, who increasingly wonder how the SDLP can reconcile —

**Mr D Bradley:** Will the deputy Minister give way?

**Mr M McGuinness:** No, I will not give way.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The Member should not persist.

**Mr M McGuinness:** Such negativity from the SDLP towards the Executive is not lost on the electorate, who increasingly wonder how the SDLP can reconcile its opposition to the major decisions of the Executive with its continuing involvement in the same Executive. It appears to me that the only message that the electorate can take from such an approach is that the SDLP is not just confused; it is divided.

With the privilege of agreeing a Programme for Government comes a tremendous responsibility to deliver real results. It is about leadership, and it is a responsibility that stretches beyond the Chamber. It is very much the people's programme. It is a programme for the people, reflecting the concerns of the people, and it will need to be delivered by the Executive in partnership with the people.

## 6.00 pm

We in government cannot make the fundamental changes that are required in our society without the help and consent of those who expect us to deliver the commitments in the Programme for Government. This represents a genuine challenge and opportunity to work across government and the business, statutory, community and voluntary sectors in society as a whole to deliver the transformation that is needed.

I commend the Programme for Government to the Assembly. It is a programme that articulates the key challenges facing us; it is a programme that provides a balanced range of commitments, centred on the economy and tackling disadvantage; it is a programme that resonates with the needs and wishes of the people; and it is a programme that sees the Executive working together for everyone. Important as the PFG is, however, as the famous business guru Peter Drucker once said:

*"Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work."*

I commend the Programme for Government to the House.

*Question put.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 73; Noes 11.*

## AYES

*Ms M Anderson, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, 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 Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Brady and Mr G Robinson.*

## NOES

*Mr Allister, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKevitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Mr Eastwood.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly endorses the Programme for Government 2011-15 agreed by the Executive.*

6.15 pm

## Ministerial Statement

### Salmon Conservation in the DCAL Jurisdiction

**Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):**

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I am making this — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Members must leave the Chamber in an orderly fashion.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am making this statement to the Assembly today to update the House on actions that I have taken on salmon conservation in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) jurisdiction. This is very much a live topic, and Members will recall the lively debate on 21 February this year on the sustainability of indigenous fish stocks. All Members who spoke agreed that salmon stocks are in a serious decline and that, without intervention, the future of this iconic species is under severe threat.

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

At the salmon summit in La Rochelle in France in October 2011, international scientists confirmed that wild Atlantic salmon are dying at sea in alarming numbers. Southern stock, including some in North America and Europe, are threatened with extinction. Long-term monitoring of the survival of salmon during the marine phase of their life cycle, which was conducted at the Department's Bushmills salmon station, shows a decline in salmon returning to the River Bush to spawn from around 30% prior to 1997 to less than 5% today.

In conjunction with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), conservation limits have been established for a suite of rivers, which represent an index of the river types in the DCAL jurisdiction. These monitored rivers have failed to achieve the conservation limit in most years since 2002. North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) guidelines state that fishing on stocks that are below the conservation limits should not be permitted. That applies equally to commercial netting and recreational angling. AFBI has also determined that licensed drift nets and bag nets that fish for salmon off the County Antrim coast are intercepting mixed stocks of salmon from rivers monitored by DCAL as well as salmon from the Foyle catchment area.

Members will be aware that my Department wrote to the six commercial salmon netsmen holding DCAL licences in 2011 asking them not to apply for 2012 licences. However, all six netsmen had applied for the 2012 licences, requiring me to decide on their issue. My officials met with the salmon netsmen at the end of February to advise them of the Department's position and to hear their views on voluntary salmon conservation measures for the 2012 season. After the meeting and subsequent communications, a number of the netsmen have provided my Department with clear undertakings that they will not fish for salmon in 2012 if they are issued with licences.

After careful consideration of all the facts, I have decided to issue licences to those netsmen who have provided undertakings to the Department not to fish. Given that we

have assurances that the netsmen will not fish in 2012, the Department considers that action to be consistent with its obligations under the EC habitats directive and with NASCO guidelines. Most importantly, it means that those nets will not be exploiting wild Atlantic salmon in 2012, which is a first step in our efforts to conserve this iconic species.

In an attempt to reach a mutually acceptable resolution to the matter at this time, my officials are continuing to liaise with those netsmen who have not yet provided a suitable undertaking and who will not, therefore, be issued with a licence. I also recently called on anglers to adopt the practice of catch and release when angling for salmon during the 2012 season. Current legislation does not readily enable the introduction of further restrictions on the taking of salmon in time for the opening of the fishing season, and, consequently, voluntary measures are the best option available to minimise the killing of salmon by anglers in 2012. This is an interim step to allow the Department to consult on how to contribute to the long-term sustainability of wild Atlantic salmon stocks.

Early indications are encouraging, with a significant number of angling clubs and anglers expressing their support for my call for voluntary catch and release for salmon. To reinforce that call, my Department is taking the lead by introducing catch and release only for salmon in all DCAL public angling estate waters. It is now a condition of sale for all DCAL game fishing permits that any salmon caught be returned to the water unharmed.

The Loughs Agency has made a declaration, under the Foyle Area (Control of Fishing) Regulations 2010, that netting is suspended on the River Foyle, Lough Foyle and seaward of Lough Foyle and that angling on the River Finn is restricted to catch and release only for the 2012 season. The Loughs Agency supports and echoes the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's request for all anglers to practise catch-and-release methods for salmon and sea trout. The Department is asking anglers to fly-fish only, using single barbless hooks to minimise damage to fish. We also ask anglers to avoid more harmful methods, such as worming and shrimping and the use of treble hooks. That will be closely monitored by the Department's fishery protection officers, and it is expected that all permit holders will comply with the condition. I am aware of a significant number of private fishery owners who have voluntarily agreed to use catch-and-release methods only. I commend them for their decision and, again, encourage others to follow suit.

I thank the House for the opportunity to update Members on these actions. I will keep the House informed of progress on the conservation and protection of salmon stocks in the DCAL jurisdiction.

**Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure):**

The Committee recognises that conservation measures must be taken to ensure the future sustainability of salmon. The Committee wrote to the Minister to ensure that all stakeholders in the process are treated equitably and that the conservation measures adopted by the Department are fair, balanced, enforceable, open and transparent. The Committee is pleased that conversations took place with the netsmen. That resulted in some, if not all, of them voluntarily agreeing not to fish during the 2012 season in order to give the Department time to fully consult on measures for the longer-term

sustainability of salmon. What assurances has the Minister received that the actions that she and her Department have taken will meet the obligations of the EC directive and will result in financial penalties being avoided?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I thank the Member for her question. The Committee Chair is right in saying that she sent a letter on behalf of the Committee, which, I believe, all the Committee agreed with, calling for a considered approach to make sure that there was equity among all anglers. I am pleased that the approach that my Department and I have taken has been acknowledged. I have received assurances that our actions are compliant with the EU directives, NASCO guidelines and, indeed, the salmon management plan. To be honest, I think that this is the best way forward: all anglers, recreational and commercial, not fishing for salmon during the 2012 season.

**Mr McMullan:** I thank the Minister for her detailed and comprehensive statement. Can she tell us what action could be taken by the EU if the Department does not take appropriate steps to conserve wild Atlantic salmon stocks?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** As was outlined in the debate on 21 February, non-compliance with the EU habitats directive or the water framework directive could result in proceedings against us. There has been mention that we could incur significant fines of £350,000 daily. Given the assurances that we have received, I am happy that we are complying with those directives and that we are meeting our responsibilities in respect of salmon conservation. I just want to repeat this point: there will be no fishing for salmon during 2012. As a result, I think that we will meet our obligations to Europe.

**Mr Swann:** I welcome the Minister's statement and the fact that DCAL waters will be catch and release only. I thank the Minister for making that clear at this stage. The statement quashes the rumours that she intended to close rivers, which I think would have been unhelpful to everybody. So, again, I thank her for that. I can see her smiling because I am sure that she did not think that I would thank her as much.

Of the six netmen involved, it is obvious now that some of them have not agreed not to put down nets. Can she indicate how many netmen are still holding out? What monitoring will now go ahead in areas where netmen have agreed voluntarily to stop fishing? What infraction penalties will she put in place if her Department finds that nets have been put down? Will she actually revoke licences? Does the Department foresee any legal action from not issuing licences?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** There were quite a lot of questions. I was not smiling because the Member thanked me; I was smiling because he wants to hear the rumours that I have heard about things that I will do.

**Mr Swann:** I have heard worse.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am sure you have. I am sure that you are not responsible for any of them. *[Laughter.]*

All joking aside; the Member asked some questions, all of which are valuable. I will get back to him in writing about what will happen if the netmen who have agreed not to fish have broken the terms under which their licences have been issued. Therefore, I will get back to the Member with that information.

Four of the six netmen have given us assurances with which we are happy. The other two netmen have given us assurances that we do not feel are robust enough yet. I believe that they are genuine in their approach to salmon conservation. We are working towards a resolution. I am optimistic. Given the history of people on the waters and shores, the backgrounds from which those people come and, in fairness, their commitment to salmon conservation, I am hopeful that a resolution can be achieved for all six netmen, rather than for four of the six.

I will get back to the Member on the other questions that he asked after I have checked the Hansard report.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I remind Members to confine their enthusiasm to one question.

**Mrs McKeivitt:** I welcome the Minister's statement this evening. Given the fact that her officials did not meet the netmen until the end of February, is she happy with the Department's consultation process?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Officials met the netmen throughout the consultation period. The difficulty was meeting six different netmen in the build up to this statement. It was a matter of suiting the netmen rather than officials simply sitting there. It is not fair to portray officials as inactive or, even, relaxed about the issue; far from it.

For the record, DCAL officials who have been looking after fisheries have been inundated. They have been doing a very good job. They have been fair in their dealings with netmen and, indeed, with all anglers. In fact, that feedback has come to me from anglers and, indeed, the netmen. I believe that the four netmen who have agreed not to fish would be quite pleased with the levels of consultation that they have had. If they were not pleased, I do not believe that we would have reached a resolution. We are still optimistic and pursuing the other two netmen. Hopefully, they, too, will find a resolution to the issue.

**Mr Lunn:** I thank the Minister for her statement, which at least confirms, once again, how serious the situation is with regard to salmon stocks. Three per cent of salmon returning to the River Bush is an incredibly low figure.

Has there been any discussion, investigation or recognition of the connection, which is widely perceived, between the proliferation of salmon farms and the reduction in the wild salmon population? There is a feeling that escapees from salmon farms are polluting the genuine bloodlines of wild salmon and that this is part of the effect of all that.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I thank the Member for his question. He may recall from the debate on 21 February that Members brought research that spoke of the concerns that he has raised. That concern, in conjunction with others, such as overfishing for salmon, the state of river beds and river pollution, has led to that huge reduction. I am sure that there are many other reasons that AFBI and others have brought forward. At the end of the day, as the Member said, it is a serious situation.

#### 6.30 pm

In order for us to regenerate our towns and villages and to increase tourism, it is important that the angling estate is fit for purpose and that we do everything that we can to make



sure that that is the case. This is one in a series of steps that we hope to take. The Member is right. He raised one area of concern but there are many others.

**Mr Hilditch:** I welcome the Minister's statement. I was going to ask about the late departmental communications with some of the stakeholders, but the Minister has answered that question. What discussions have taken place with other jurisdictions on this crucial issue, and particularly with those jurisdictions that share Irish Sea waters? What information can be shared?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The salmon summit in France in October was attended by representatives from Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Britain and Norway. I think that all the countries with surrounding waters attended that summit. There is a general and widespread acceptance that our salmon stocks are at a serious level, and each jurisdiction has a responsibility to bring forward salmon management plans. Those discussions are ongoing, and any updates that we receive from the summit will be fed through to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure in the first instance. Although we have responsibility for and can take steps to ensure the conservation of salmon, it is incumbent on other jurisdictions to do likewise.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas sin. I welcome the statement that, as Mr Swann said earlier, clears the water. I also welcome the fact the Foyle fishery has been included in the plans. If the catch-and-release system was fully complied with and the voluntary suspension of the nets remained in place for 2012, what would that mean, in real terms, for the numbers of fish that would potentially not be caught and could thereby go back into the river systems? In other words, how many fish were caught last year that could potentially get through this year to spawn in the winter?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I know that the Member is a keen angler. I was delighted that there had been no fishing puns, but you were the first to introduce them, Cathal. There are two sets of figures. If the Member is referring to the figures for angling, the total number of fish caught by rod in the DCAL area in 2010 was 1,474 and a similar number — 1,619 — were caught by rod in 2009. I will supply the other figures for commercial fishing in writing.

**Mrs Hale:** I thank the Minister for her statement. Will the Minister inform the House whether the growing scourge of poaching and illegal netting, which threatens not only fish stocks but the lives of public officials, is being treated as a priority by the Department?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I assure the Member that it is absolutely a priority. That issue was raised during the debate in February, it has been also raised in Assembly questions and there has been some media coverage about it. I am concerned that our protection and enforcement officers should be allowed to do their jobs in safety. I believe that they are doing a good job. If Members have information about any gaps in cover or in the enforcement presence, we would appreciate that being brought forward. The Member's concern was whether we were treating that as a priority, and we are. We are also going to do our best to ensure that those who are out doing a good job are protected.

**Mrs Overend:** If the netsmen decided to put down their nets again in 2013, what would be the consequences under the

EU habitats directive? Would DCAL still be liable to infraction fines? The Department has 11 bailiffs. Will the Minister give any further support to the voluntary club bailiffs?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I will deal with the Member's last point first. I will get back to her in writing because I am not sure how many bailiffs there are or where they are. I am hearing about different clubs coming forward, which is very welcome, because those people love the rivers and love their fishing, and DCAL needs to support them where possible.

The Member asked about 2013, but I am dealing with 2012, and I hope that, straight after this statement, we will go out to consultation to determine what we need to do in addition to the requirements of the 1966 Fisheries Act and the EU habitats directive guidelines. I hope that we can all use the consultation period to engage constructively.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas atá déanta aici ar chaomhnú bradáin sa dlínse seo. I thank the Minister for her statement on salmon conservation. Considering the fact that, according to her statement, there has been a decline in the rate of salmon returning to spawn from 30% in 1997 to 5% at present, can she assure us that the measures that she intends to introduce are not a case of lifting the nets when the fish have gone? Will she further assure us that those measures will have a positive effect on fish numbers, considering the fact that, according to her statement, the problem really lies out deep in the Atlantic?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I thank the Member for his questions. First, it is to be welcomed that there will be no salmon fishing through 2012. It is anticipated that this will provide breathing space for increasing salmon stocks, which will be closely monitored during the period. It makes sense that when we do not have huge commercial fishing taking most of the salmon away, those salmon should be sustained.

What happens beyond that? What conservation measures are we taking? That is what is at the bottom of the Member's second question; if it is not, he can come back to me in writing and I will happily give him whatever information I have. We are taking a number of additional measures because it is not just about taking the nets out. It is about what else DCAL is doing. It is also about making sure that, for example, we could adopt additional salmon conservation measures that are informed by robust scientific evidence and the stakeholder consultation that we are going into.

We could also introduce further temporal restrictions by limiting the times when salmon may be caught. We could, for example, as part of the consultation, suggest shortening the fishing season. The Department could also consider restricting the numbers of salmon being caught, by introducing quotas on a daily or seasonal basis. Indeed, as I said during the debate on 21 February, we could consider no one catching salmon at all. However, I am sure that during the consultation, there will be other suggestions about how we preserve salmon.

**Mr I McCrea:** The Minister has referred to the consultation period that she hopes will commence following her statement. Will she assure the House that those who are totally opposed to the nets, many of whom are, no doubt, watching this debate online at the moment, will be part of that consultation and that their views will be taken into consideration?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The consultation is open to everyone. Even though some people who are anglers may have a stronger voice and bigger representation than others, the consultation has to be open to everyone, including some of the state agencies and Departments that have responsibility for the loughs and the rivers. I do not want to predetermine what the consultation will look like but I hope that it will include local government, which is ideally situated to take forward, assist and facilitate consultations, particularly when there are groups that may not have as great a degree of experience as others. It is important that everyone not only takes part in the consultation but is constructive. It is not just about people saying, "We do not like this" or, "We like that."

If people do not like something, they need to come forward with alternatives. I think that everyone can agree, regardless of what they think, that we have demonstrated that we have been listening and that we have acted and have been seen to give reasonable evidence and strong assurances. We will continue to do that, and the consultation, which will be forthcoming, is another opportunity to do that.

**Mr Frew:** What additional resources will be put in place in the Department's Bushmills salmon station on the River Bush, which is in my constituency of North Antrim, to assist in the research for that important fish species? Will that research be commissioned wider to include the River Bann, Lough Neagh and all the feeder rivers, including the Maine, the Braid and the Kellswater rivers?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I thank the Member for his question. I do not have the information to hand but I will get it to him. I was going to say that you need to widen the net, but that is really cheesy. You need to cover as many of the waters as possible because our rivers do not stop but all interflow into each other. Benefits for one need to be felt by the others. I will get back to the Member in writing.

**Mr Byrne:** I welcome the Minister's statement and I congratulate her on the way that she has listened to fishing interests. I particularly welcome the Loughs Agency's decision relating to the Foyle system. Is the Minister content that there will be enough bailiffs on the Foyle system to police and protect what she has brought in?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** As part of the consultation on salmon preservation, our officials in the Foyle and Carlingford areas are in regular discussion and contact with each other. It is important that, coming into the fishing season, our rivers and loughs are protected. As the Member may have heard previously, it is also important not only that the rivers are protected but that people who enforce our legislation on those rivers are protected.

**Mr Allister:** Given that the Minister told me on 30 January that I was wrong to suggest that she had any powers to withhold net licences, I welcome the journey that she has made. Will she give us an assurance that she will be resolute in refusing to issue licences to the two outstanding netmen who have not agreed, if they continue to take that position, and that she will not back down?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The two netmen who have not been issued with licences will not get their licences unless the assurances that they provide are as robust as the assurances that the other four netmen provided. If those assurances are not strong, they will not get a licence. That is very clear.

## Executive Committee Business

### Superannuation Bill: First Stage

**Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):** I beg to introduce the Superannuation Bill [NIA 6/11-15], which is a Bill to make provision for and in connection with limiting the value of the benefits which may be provided under so much of any scheme under Article 3 of the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 as provides by virtue of Article 4(2) of that Order for benefits to be provided by way of compensation to or in respect of persons who suffer loss of office or employment; and to make provision about the procedure for modifying such a scheme.

*Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.*

## Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012

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

*That the Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.*

As Members will be aware, the Rates (Regional Rates) Order is introduced annually and stems from the Executive's agreed Budget, which was brought to the Assembly in March 2011. That Budget covers a four-year period from 2011 to 2015. Members will be aware that the regional rate supplements Northern Ireland's share of relevant public expenditure and is a key component of the Executive's annual Budget, which was last debated in this Assembly on 14 February.

### 6.45 pm

The regional rate provides in the region of an extra 6% over and above the Barnett settlement, and that will help to fund departmental expenditure on hospitals, roads, schools and other essential services. The regional rate represents just over half of the typical rates bill, and the other half is made up of district rates that are set independently by local councils. Councils have undertaken significant work this year to keep district rates as low as possible, and the average district rate will increase by around 2.4%. As part of our four-year Budget, it has been agreed that the regional rate will be frozen in real terms until 2014-15, and that will provide certainty and stability for businesses and households to plan and manage their finances. Real term corrects for the effects of inflation, and we are using the Treasury gross domestic product (GDP) deflator.

The legislation before you today for approval is a simple outworking of that important Budget decision. It will fix two regional rates in the pound for 2012-13: one for households and one for business ratepayers. This year's order provides for a small increase, 2.2%, in the regional rate for the 2012-13 rating year for both households and businesses. That means that, in this coming year, rates bills overall will increase by an average of around 2.3%.

The Executive are committed to ensuring that household and commercial budgets are protected, given the continuing economic difficulties being faced across the board. Contrast that with the average rise of over 10% in the domestic regional rate across the last four years of direct rule. This order, therefore, represents the best that we can do to balance the interests of ratepayers and the demands of public expenditure. Surprisingly, I have had submissions to my office recently from people who claim that the regional rate should be increased by much more than the 2.2% provided for by this order. That, however, begs the question of where ratepayers would find the additional money at this difficult time. Although we want more resources to be available to the Executive, many households and businesses are finding things increasingly difficult. Holding the regional rate constant in cash terms also complements the commercial rating measures that the Assembly approved last month. I am glad to report to the Assembly that the legislation received Royal Assent recently, and the measures will be introduced from the start of next month.

I will not go into the detail of this again, but I can confirm that under the expanded small business rate relief scheme,

an extra 8,300 business ratepayers will find their new rate bills reduced by 20% in the coming year. In addition, the Executive have agreed to hold manufacturing rates at 30%, which will help around 4,500 manufacturing business. That economic support measure is unique to Northern Ireland. It is also worth noting that while rate bills for business ratepayers in the rest of the UK are pegged at a rate of inflation as well, their calculations are based on the higher retail price index at September each year. As a result, business rates in other parts of the UK will increase by 5-6% in April — more than double the increase locally.

In the domestic sector, decisions taken by this Executive and Assembly have ensured that domestic ratepayers in Northern Ireland continue to have the lowest household bills in any part of the United Kingdom. As Members are aware, the modest increase for domestic ratepayers is well below the trend for the past decade, particularly for the last period of direct rule. Members will recall the enormous 19% hike in the domestic regional rate that was forced on households in 2006. In addition, households have benefited from the Executive decision to defer water charges.

We also have better targeted rate reliefs and allowances compared with the council tax in England. The average household in Northern Ireland is much better off than in other parts of the UK in local taxes and charges, and certainly much better off than we would have been under direct rule. The average domestic rate bill in 2012-13 will be around £255 lower than it would have been had the increases of the last years of direct rule taken place. Since 2008, that cumulative saving has been in the region of £775.

Should there be any naysayers in the House — I do not think there will be at this stage, but you never know — let me say this: rebalancing the economy during the continuing downturn and through to recovery means keeping money in the pockets of businesses and consumers. We will not dip into those pockets any more than is necessary until we have made all the savings there are to be made in delivering efficient and effective regional government and public services. Devolution has allowed us to do that and to do things differently in Northern Ireland.

Of course, there are limits to the concessions we can make locally and still raise enough money to help to pay for essential public services. I say that because, every month, someone with a worthy cause comes along, asking for more or for an exemption. This month, it has been ghost estates. Last month, it was town centres. The month before, it was sports clubs. The month before that, it was the equine industry. We have to be realistic, otherwise we will end up playing spot the ratepayer, because nobody will be paying any rates.

It is a local taxation system, not a benefit system. If sectors need supporting, we should look to other ways of doing that, rather than immediately jumping to the conclusion that the rating system is the best vehicle for delivering help and, somehow, is not real money. Any revenue foregone is less money for public expenditure here. That said, to date, I believe that the Executive and Assembly have taken a very measured and balanced approach to the whole area, and, as a result, we have a better rating system in place than the one that we inherited after direct rule. That has been achieved only because of cross-party support secured through this Assembly and the previous one. It represents a real success for this Administration.

My next move to improve the system will be to secure Executive agreement as soon as possible to undertake a non-domestic general revaluation, taking effect from April 2015. That cannot wait any longer, even though the commercial property market is still weak and uncertain. The system is simply too important, and fairness has to be maintained and restored. To underline its significance, Members will be aware that we have just passed the £1 billion mark for rate receipts, regional and domestic rate, domestic and non-domestic. Taken together, the domestic and commercial regional rate will raise up to £606 million in the next rating year.

Finally, to move on to more technical matters, the order specifies the rate poundage for 2012-13. Article 1 sets out the title of the order and gives the operational date as the day after it is affirmed by the Assembly. Article 2 provides that the order will apply for the 2012-13 rating year through to 31 March 2013, and article 3 specifies 32·15p in the pound as the commercial regional poundage and 0·3780p in the pound as the domestic regional rate poundage. I look forward to hearing Members' comments, and I commend the order to the Assembly.

**Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his opening remarks. The 2011-15 Budget, which was agreed by the previous Assembly on 7 March 2011, proposed that both domestic and non-domestic regional rates should be uplifted only in line with inflation. The purpose of today's rule is to set the rate of uplift for 2012-13. The policy proposals contained in the statutory rule were considered by the Committee on 1 February 2012. The Committee noted that the regional rates increase set out in the proposals amounted to a 2·2% uplift, which is less than the rate of inflation by either the retail or the consumer price index. The Department clarified that the reason was that it reflected the GDP deflator at the time at which the Budget was agreed. The Committee had no issues to raise in respect of those policy proposals at that time.

The Committee formally considered the statutory rule that is before the Assembly today on 29 February, together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules, which had no points to raise by way of technical scrutiny of the rule. The Committee agreed to recommend that the Rates (Regional Rates) Order (NI) 2012 be affirmed by the Assembly. Therefore, I support the motion.

**Mr Girvan:** I support the motion. In doing so, I want to outline some points of significance, including the fact that, as was alluded to, we have set a 2·2% increase for the year 2012-13. I compare that to what has happened in the rest of the UK, where the rate has been set at 5·6%. That is because they have used the consumer price index, which has a different calculation and will come out with a higher rate.

We have used an imaginative process; we can increase by up to 6% on the Barnett settlement through the rates process. As was stated by the Minister, the regional rate component makes up just over 50% of the rates bill that the general public will receive. Another advantage is that up to 8,300 small businesses will get the advantage of the 20% reduction by setting the rateable value at £10,000 as opposed to the £5,000 settlement that was there previously. There is a greater benefit to a number of small businesses.

The order will give the general public some sense of budgeting. They will know where we stand because we have set the Budget forward to 2014 and 2015. On that basis, we have said that we will follow the pricing structure. I have noticed that some figures state that it will go up to 2·7% for the following two years, but it is 2·2% this year for the regional rate. I support the motion.

**Mr Wilson:** I thank the Chairman of the Committee and Mr Girvan for their contributions to the debate. As I do regularly, I thank the Committee for the way in which it has scrutinised the legislation and for its support. I re-emphasise the points that have been made: this is a good deal for ratepayers in Northern Ireland. As the Member for South Antrim pointed out, it is more than 50% lower than the increase in the rest of the United Kingdom. It comes after a period in which we froze rates, and it comes with all the rates relief that we give to small businesses, the manufacturing industry, lone pensioners and low-income families. There is a whole range of other ways in which we seek to support people at this particularly difficult time. Therefore, I hope that it will be recognised as a good-news story by the people whom I described earlier as the naysayers. My colleague from North Down felt that I was talking about those who were involved in the equine industry when I talked about the naysayers, but that is his form of humour.

**Mr Weir:** Frank Carson is spinning in his grave.

**Mr Wilson:** Yes, he is.

I hope that it will be noted that we have sought to alleviate the burden for local ratepayers. I commend the order to the Assembly.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** As section 63 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 applies to the motion, it requires cross-community support.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved (with cross-community support):*

*That the Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.*

7.00 pm

## **Rates (Microgeneration) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012**

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

*That the Rates (Microgeneration) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.*

This order is essentially a harmonising measure that brings practice in Northern Ireland into line with that in the rest of the UK. It also serves to align this particular rating policy with the Executive's Programme for Government and the strategic energy framework. The order will ensure that the installation of microgeneration equipment at business premises — for example, solar panels, wind turbines and ground-source heat pumps — does not increase rates bills. As a result, commercial ratepayers who make such improvements to their premises between now and the next revaluation, in 2015, will see no change in their current rates bill, all other things being equal.

The measure has its origins in the 2008 Budget, when the Government announced a range of measures to promote sustainable growth. Included in those measures was one relating to occupiers of commercial premises and the issue of business rates acting as a disincentive to the installation of microgeneration equipment, as doing so could increase rates bills.

The legislation has been implemented in the rest of the United Kingdom, as it was enacted to coincide with the general revaluation there. Members will know that we could not proceed with a revaluation here, so this harmonising measure did not get introduced. I do not think that we should wait until 2015, when the next revaluation here is planned, to get this on the statute book. All that the order does is ensure that any increase in liability due to investment in microgeneration equipment is disregarded for the life of the valuation list.

As part of the process of bringing the order to the Assembly for approval, a targeted consultation was carried out, including the Northern Ireland Local Government Association. No comments were received, and there was no objection to the proposals.

The measures in the order will result in negligible costs to business, while the delay in bringing forward the measure has not disadvantaged anyone in the business community. Put simply, to date, Land and Property Services has not had cause to separately assess the value of any of this equipment, so there is nothing yet to be disregarded. Therefore, the measure does not have a significant cost. It is, though, about aligning policy and providing the right signals to business that the Executive and Assembly support investments that help to conserve energy resources.

It is a modest measure, and I expect that it will have only a minor impact at the moment. However, as we look ahead, it may become more significant. I do not wish to put Northern Ireland businesses at a disadvantage to those in the rest of the UK. The order will amend the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 to provide that, to the extent that plant or

machinery has microgeneration capacity, such capacity is not taken into account in a valuation for rating purposes.

Article 1 contains the citation and commencement provisions. Article 2 inserts a definition of "microgeneration capacity" in article 2(2) of the 1977 order and amends paragraph 3 of Part III of schedule 12 to that order. That dispenses with the detail of the order.

I look forward to hearing Members' comments. I commend the order to the Assembly.

**Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his opening remarks. As he said, the purpose of the order is to include a definition of "microgeneration capacity" in the 1977 order and to amend the appropriate classes in schedule 12 to that order. Plants or machinery in compliance with this definition of "microgeneration capacity" will not be assessed for rates in accordance with the current valuation list.

The policy proposals in this statutory rule were considered by the Committee on 28 September 2011. At that time, the Committee had no issues to raise in respect of those policy proposals. The Committee formally considered the statutory rule before the Assembly today at its meeting on 29 February, together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules, which raised no issues by way of technical scrutiny.

The Committee agreed to recommend that the Rates (Microgeneration) Order (NI) 2012 be affirmed by the Assembly. I, therefore, support the motion.

**Mr Girvan:** I thank the Minister for bringing this forward, and, as the Chair of the Committee has indicated, the order came before the Committee just for noting and considering.

In relation to microgeneration, a lot of people have wrong ideas about these things. I, for one, when I first looked at the order, thought it was to do with microregeneration. However, it is definitely microgeneration. In dealing with wind turbines and that type of equipment, including solar panels, and how the biomass generation process could benefit a business by reducing its energy bill, there is advantage in coming into line with what has been approved and is in force in the rest of the United Kingdom. I do not see there being much controversy in putting this forward. As alluded to, it seems that very little cost will be attributed to it. We should ensure that it is included as a sector in the 2015 revaluation process and given a categorisation so that it can be looked at by Land and Property Services. I support the motion.

**Mr Cree:** As the Chairman of the Committee said, this matter was discussed at some length in Committee and found unanimous support. It makes sense, because it will encourage people in small businesses and, perhaps, larger ones to support alternative energies. That gives a greater prospect of carbon reduction and cost savings, which is what we are all aiming for. It will also help us to meet some of our Programme for Government targets. Last but by no means least, it brings us into line with the legislation in other parts of the United Kingdom. I fully support the motion.

**Mrs Cochrane:** I, too, am grateful for the opportunity to speak to the order. Given its technical nature and the merit within it, I will keep my commentary short.

The Minister and others have already outlined for us the details that serve to underpin this directive, but, in effect, the order also has the potential to do two things: first, to encourage our society to use and embrace renewable energy, thus reducing our demand for fossil fuels; and, secondly, to positively impact on our environment. In the past, Northern Ireland has been shown to be lagging when it comes to green economy issues. We should look to the examples set by others as an illustration of how beneficial and valuable an earnest green economy can be both to industry and to the labour market.

The provisions in the order are a small step in the right direction, allowing for plant and machinery with the capacity for microgeneration to be excluded from rating valuations. Therefore, it gives due recognition to the potential value of microgeneration as part of our overall economic recovery. I hope that, beyond offering support to this financial olive branch to the green industry, the provisions can go on to serve as a catalyst for more serious consideration and resources being awarded to the green economy as we look to the future. A green economy will not just create jobs and investment but will help to cut our carbon emissions, improve our environment and, ultimately, improve our quality of life. I support the order.

**Mr Wilson:** I thank the Members who have taken part in the debate. I thank the Chairman and Committee for their support and Mr Girvan, Mr Cree and Mrs Cochrane for their comments in support of the order.

I will just clear up a couple of things. This is not designed to encourage anyone to do anything; it is simply to avoid a situation where they may be discouraged by the possibility of having property revalued upwards because they have installed some microgeneration plant. However, I have made it clear that, to date, despite the fact that some people have installed such measures in their property, there has been no upward revaluation of any property. That is why it does not represent a huge cost; the cost is negligible.

I was told not to rise to the bait, but I have to respond to the points that Mrs Cochrane made. First of all, this is not likely to be a measure that will, in any way, significantly save the planet, bring down carbon emissions or stop temperatures rising. When one considers that 10,000 massive 400-foot wind turbines would be able to produce probably somewhere under 10% of our total electricity, if they were to operate efficiently, and reduce our carbon emissions by 0.3% for the United Kingdom as a whole, in that context a couple of solar panels on a roof or heat-collecting things in the ground or whatever it happens to be —

**Mr Hamilton:** Heat source pumps.

**Mr Wilson:** Heat source pumps in the ground are hardly likely to make a significant difference. All that this is about is ensuring that people are not in any way disadvantaged by having the rateable valuation of their property increased when they decide to spend money on those things, and it keeps us in line with the rest of the United Kingdom.

I would not like Members to think that I am one of these snake oil salesmen who suggest that this is a way to save the planet. I do not want Members to think that by doing this, somehow or other we will have saved the planet in 50 years. I accept, however, that some businesses will, hopefully, make a commercial decision that some of these

measures will help them to conserve energy or reduce their energy bills and make them more competitive. If they make that investment, at least we will not stand in their way. Therefore, I ask that Members support this measure.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Minister, your comments certainly generated heat in the Chamber.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the Rates (Microgeneration) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.*

*Adjourned at 7.13 pm.*

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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 13 March 2012

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Assembly Business

**Mr Campbell:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday, at Question Time for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I submitted a supplementary question to question 2 that related to a peace report. In my supplementary question, I quoted directly from the report, which was referred to in question 2 and involved dealing with the past. I then put a question to the deputy First Minister about his past. At that point, according to Hansard, the Deputy Speaker said:

*"The Minister may or may not wish to answer that question."*

There is an implication there. That language is normally used when a supplementary questioner departs from the substance of the question. My strong contention is that I did not. May I ask you to examine Hansard, Mr Speaker? I know that you normally write to Members after you have done that, and I would be content with that. Just as we in the House are planning for the future, we must not allow those who are guilty to escape from their murderous past.

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the Member for his point of order. As the Member will know — he is a Member of another House — these issues can sometimes be difficult to judge. It is really up to the Deputy Speaker who is in the Chair at the time to try to judge these issues. When it comes to supplementary questions, that is sometimes not easy; it is difficult. I am certainly happy to look at Hansard and come back to the Member.

## Executive Committee Business

### Economic Strategy

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to three hours for the debate. The Minister will have 15 minutes to propose the motion and 30 minutes to wind. All other Members who wish to speak will have up to eight minutes.

**Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):** I beg to move

*That this Assembly endorses the Northern Ireland economic strategy agreed by the Executive.*

Yesterday, the Assembly approved the Programme for Government, which set out the Executive's key objectives for the next few years. I now wish to bring the economic strategy to the Assembly.

We are all familiar with Bill Clinton's famous phrase, which he used during the 1992 presidential campaign: "It's the economy, stupid." That phrase is now well worn, but the sentiment remains, for the economy impacts on all of us, especially at the moment, as we work to secure greater and more sustained economic growth. That is why the Executive, in their Programme for Government, have made the economy their number one priority, with the economic strategy being published alongside the Programme for Government.

It is clear that the outlook for the local, regional and global economy remains uncertain. In Europe, we have seen the ongoing crisis in the euro zone and the European Union's attempts to reach a stability pact. We have still to see a full resolution of the problems facing Greece and some other European countries. President Obama said recently that Europe is going through a financial crisis that is scaring the world. The uncertainty is having an unwelcome but inevitable impact on many businesses here in Northern Ireland. Equally, however, I know that many parts of the global economy are growing, and it is important that we work to build trading relationships and secure new orders in those markets.

To support our local companies, Invest Northern Ireland has strengthened its global footprint, with enhanced representation in the United States, Canada, Russia, Latin America and South Africa. Such on-the-ground representation will be supported by an extensive programme of 60 business missions this year, which will have a key focus on the emerging BRIC economies — Brazil, Russia, India and China. We will also continue to monitor and target opportunities in other emerging markets, including our focus on the cash-rich countries of the Gulf, where Invest

NI recently strengthened its presence by opening an office in Jeddah. Along with the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, I will shortly join Invest Northern Ireland's latest business mission to the United Arab Emirates and India to further develop the already strong trade, investment and education links that exist and to explore new relationships. All that activity is designed to help us to identify new sources of investment and opportunities on which Northern Ireland can capitalise. However, to maximise the benefits of that work, I recognise that we need to ensure that our local companies are aware of the trading opportunities in those countries. We will do all we can to help them to enter those markets and to succeed in them.

We should also be confident in the potential of our local companies to rise to the challenge. I recently visited CEM Systems in Belfast to learn how it secured business worth £500,000 for a high-tech security system at a huge gold mine in Mongolia. Another local company — Fast Engineering in Antrim — is providing its portable water storage tanks to the Antarctic survey, and Muldoon Transport Systems in Dungannon and Bubble NI from Belfast have both recently won business in Saudi Arabia.

While exports in the manufacturing sector remain resilient to global trends, it is important to recognise that Northern Ireland has also experienced record investment in research and development. That success must be built on. By increasing R&D support for companies that have never undertaken R&D or have not been active for some time, we are encouraging more and more mainly small businesses to become innovation-active. We must also continue to invest in our first-class education establishments, which continue to produce important skilled labour for our economy. Our people remain our key asset, and it will be the skills of the workforce that will underpin the necessary innovation and export capability to drive economic growth.

Many more people will visit us over the coming months, as we mark hugely important events, and we need to build on that for the wider economy. However, I recognise that many people have been personally affected by the recession, and our unemployment levels are too high. Part of the economic strategy is to work to provide suitable and sustainable employment opportunities for everyone, especially our young people. It is also worth remembering that, despite the growth in unemployment, the latest labour market figures indicate that our unemployment rate of 7.2% is still below the rest of the United Kingdom at 8.4%, the Republic of Ireland at 14.3% and Europe at 9.8%.

Today, I have published an updated slide pack on the Northern Ireland economy that can be accessed on the strategy's website. It outlines the challenges, opportunities and strengths facing the economy, and I hope that it will be a useful source of information to many Members. The Executive and the subcommittee responsible for implementing the strategy will, later this year, publish their assessment of the wider health of the economy.

Around this time last year, we finished a consultation on a framework for the economic strategy. It was a framework that prioritised the need to improve the competitiveness of our economy. It had a focus on export-led growth and contained the twin objectives of rebalancing and rebuilding. It was built on a number of themes, such as stimulating innovation, encouraging business growth, building exports

and enhancing skills. I was pleased that the framework received widespread support. That enabled us to use it as the basis of the draft economic strategy, which we launched alongside the draft Programme for Government and investment strategy last autumn.

We put the document out to consultation, and we received almost 100 responses to the draft strategy. I very much welcome those. In general, the feedback has been very positive and constructive. There has been strong support for the cross-departmental approach, and the aim of focusing on export-led growth, even with its challenges, has been welcomed. I could not reflect on every comment, but I have published today our responses to the comments received. Again, that can be accessed on the strategy's dedicated website.

The economic strategy launched today sets out a number of more ambitious and stretching targets than were in the draft strategy. We are committing to securing £1 billion of investment to the economy. That will lever in £375 million from new and growing externally owned companies, £400 million of investment from locally owned companies and £225 million of investment from externally and locally owned firms through the jobs fund, which supports our rebuilding priority.

We are committed to having a higher target on manufacturing exports and to increasing the value of manufacturing exports by 20% by 2014-15. We have introduced a new and stretching target to increase the value of manufacturing exports to the emerging economies by 60% by 2014-15. We have a new commitment around youth employment, under the rebuilding theme. It aims to deliver, by 2015, 6,000 work experience and training opportunities for young people in priority sectors. Given the tourism potential, we have also upped our targets to increase visitor numbers and revenue by 4.2 million and £676 million respectively.

I realise and accept that access to finance remains a key challenge for many businesses throughout Northern Ireland. Having a local banking sector that meets the needs of consumers and businesses and provides bank lending on a competitive basis to local SMEs is vital to economic recovery. Only last night, I met a businessperson who raised with me very real concerns about securing adequate finance to grow and expand her business. The issues raised were not new or unique, but they represent the wider need to do all we can on improving access to finance. Ministers have been engaging with local banks, the UK and Irish Governments and regulatory authorities to press on the issue.

In the strategy, we have outlined the actions we are taking as part of Invest NI's access to capital strategy. Two weeks ago, I announced the manager for the growth loan fund, which is part of Invest NI's access to finance strategy. The growth loan fund will provide loans of between £50,000 and £500,000 over the next five years to businesses with growth projects in the manufacturing and tradable services sectors. Last week, I also announced the appointment of Clarendon to deliver the co-investment fund, which is a £16 million equity fund aimed at stimulating the availability of risk capital to SMEs across Northern Ireland. Those measures will help our local companies to grow and meet our Programme for Government targets.

I can announce today that the economic advisory group chaired by Kate Barker will undertake a focused and short-term exercise to examine whether there are any gaps in the



provision of finance and what might be done differently by the Executive to ensure that our SMEs have the necessary access to finance to start to grow their businesses.

#### 10.45 am

We must recognise the impact that high energy prices have on many businesses, especially on their cost competitiveness. We have to be realistic: the principal elements of energy prices are set on the world markets, and, being on a relatively small island, we do not have the economies of scale that other jurisdictions enjoy. Although we certainly have a more competitive market than we had a decade ago, we need to continue to develop competition in the sector through increasing our connections with the rest of the United Kingdom and the wider European market in future years. However, that will not solve the immediate pressures. Therefore, I have asked Invest Northern Ireland to work with my officials to see what more we can do in this area. I am pleased to announce that Invest will consider providing financial assistance on a pilot basis under its normal selective financial assistance schemes to large energy users that bring forward proposals for capital expenditure on equipment that will make a significant impact on energy efficiency and, by extension, reduce their energy costs and improve their competitiveness.

I am clear on the priority that we attach to the implementation of the economic strategy. We have developed a comprehensive action plan that we have consulted on. The Executive subcommittee will work to ensure that the actions and targets in the strategy and plan are implemented. We have, of course, made good progress in many areas. To support the economic strategy, we are drawing up supporting strategies that will include steps required to boost the key priorities of innovation and enterprise. We will continue to work with the United Kingdom Government as part of their initiative to rebalance the Northern Ireland economy. We had a good meeting last week as part of the joint ministerial working group that is examining how the Executive and Assembly could have the powers to set their own rate of corporation tax. We look forward to the successful conclusion of those discussions in the summer.

The UK Government are devolving powers on air passenger duty to the Assembly through the 2012 Finance Bill. That will allow the Executive to bring forward legislation to reduce air passenger duty for direct long-haul flights departing from Northern Ireland to zero. We will work to use that policy lever to develop new direct links with international long-haul markets that will ultimately support increased inward investment, exporting and inbound tourism.

In summary, despite the current economic situation, I believe that there are grounds for optimism. We have set out in the strategy some ambitious objectives and targets. We are promoting over 25,000 new jobs. We want to see more of our young unemployed move in to work. We are investing in innovation and skills to accelerate our export performance. We are leveraging significant investment into our economy to support business growth. We continue to invest in our economic infrastructure to help underpin economic growth. The Executive's economic strategy sets out how we are working to rebalance and rebuild our economy, and I ask the Assembly to endorse the motion.

**Mr A Maginness (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment):** I thank the Minister for her detailed speech on the economic strategy. The Committee welcomed the draft strategy and provided recommendations to the Department on how the economic strategy and associated draft comprehensive plan could be enhanced and bettered. The recommendations were based not only on the Committee's consideration of the draft strategy but on the views and comments of other relevant Committees in the Assembly, the business community at large and its support organisations.

Comparison of the final economic strategy with the draft strategy reveals a number of changes, which, of course, we in the Committee very much welcome. We note that the Minister has taken on board the views that we and, indeed, others expressed to the Department. First, there is the increase from £330 million to £400 million in the investment to be promoted from locally owned companies. Secondly, there is an upward revision in the target for the promotion of inward investment from £300 million to £375 million and a commitment under short- to medium-term rebuilding measures to promote £225 million of investment. Furthermore, there is an upward revision from £110 million to £140 million in company investment in skills to be delivered. Again, that is welcome. There is an upward revision from 15% to 20% in the target for increasing the value of manufacturing exports and new commitments to increase the value of exports to the emerging economies, which the Minister referred to, by 60% by 2015.

I particularly welcome the measures to address youth unemployment. They include a strategy for skills, training, incentives and job creation; consideration of options to address the vexed problem of graduate unemployment; and a new key performance indicator to deliver 6,000 work experience and training opportunities for young people by 2015. There is a commitment to work with employers on education and training in priority sectors to address skills issues and the inclusion of an action to develop direct air links with international long-haul markets, which is particularly relevant to the development of our tourist industry.

The Committee welcomes the inclusion of those commitments, which, in some cases, include more specific and more stretching targets in the economic strategy. However, a number of commitments were included in the draft strategy that are not present in the final document. They include a plan to encourage first-time exporters by promoting 60 new start-ups selling outside UK markets and a further 440 selling to Britain; a commitment under key performance indicators to enhance regional connectivity to key gateways and to markets; and a commitment to ensure that a large proportion of school leavers have key literacy and numeracy skills. Those are very important issues that need to be addressed. Therefore, the Committee would like to hear from the Minister in due course why it has been considered appropriate to remove references to them from the final strategy.

Although I welcome the economic strategy and efforts by the Department to include distinct, measurable, time-dependent targets for many actions for which it and Invest Northern Ireland have responsibility, the Committee highlighted the existence of significant gaps in a number of actions. Those actions do not include specific measurable targets either in the economic strategy or in the draft comprehensive action plan. The Committee has asked the Department to include

robust, outcome-based targets against all actions because, without that, appropriate monitoring and management of the delivery of the action plan is not possible.

Targets are also required to enable full accountability for those charged with delivering the actions in the strategy. The Committee's view on that was supported not only by other Statutory Committees but by the Federation of Small Businesses, Manufacturing Northern Ireland and the Confederation of British Industry. The Committee looks forward to seeing the revised action plan for the economic strategy in the near future and will want to see it address the issues that it has brought to the Department's attention.

Many of the actions in the economic strategy require a commitment from a number of Departments to co-operate across government to achieve outcomes. The Committee noted that, in the past, that may have resulted in frustration from some Departments that they could not achieve a high-priority objective as a result of delays in another Department for which the objective was a lower priority. The Committee agreed that assurances must be given that delays will not occur in the implementation of the economic strategy due to the misalignment of priorities between and among Departments.

The economic strategy contains a specific key action under "Business Growth" to:

*"Encourage and develop the green economy and develop the sustainable energy sector."*

Despite that, there is no specific reference in the economic strategy or the draft action plan to the green new deal or to any plan to encourage energy efficiency. Given that £12 million has been allocated to the green new deal, the Committee has asked the Department to include a reference to the green new deal in the action plan for the economic strategy. In reply to a query from the Committee, the Department said that the Minister for Social Development and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment had been working closely on the development of the green new deal, but there needs to be a greater commitment and specific action. Considering the time that has elapsed since August last year, the Committee would expect to see some reference to it in the economic strategy and would expect to see a specific reference in the final action plan for the economic strategy when it comes to the Committee. I just hope that the green new deal has not gone AWOL.

Members will be aware that the Committee is conducting an inquiry into research and development. I do not want to pre-empt the outcomes of that inquiry, but it would be appropriate to comment on the references to R&D in the economic strategy.

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

**Mr A Maginness:** Research and development is an important element, and the Department needs to place particular emphasis on it.

**Mr Buchanan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning):** I wish to comment on the elements of the economic strategy for Northern Ireland that fall within the responsibility of DEL. The Committee welcomes the emphasis on acknowledging and prioritising skills as a key driver for the future of a sustainable

economy. That emphasis is central to the rebalancing and rebuilding measures.

Theme A of the key rebalancing measures highlights the vital importance of stimulating innovation, research and development, and creativity. The Committee has been made aware of the key role played by research and development in its engagements with the universities and further education colleges. The vice chancellors of both universities have detailed the contribution to the local economy of their combined research income of just under £100 million per annum, and members saw at first hand the world-class research being carried out at the Institute of Electronics, Communications and Information Technology at the Northern Ireland Science Park recently.

The Committee is also aware of the job creation that flows from the translation of research into the local economy through companies such as QUBIS, where high-value research jobs are generated as well as a corresponding number of ancillary posts. The Committee also welcomes the collaboration between the universities, FE colleges and the business sector and has seen real-life evidence of the effectiveness of that in the showcase event it held jointly with Colleges NI in the Long Gallery in October 2011.

The work of a possible innovation council has been briefly outlined to the Committee by the Minister, and it appears that the establishment of the council, together with the work of MATRIX and the foresight programme, has been largely within the remit of DETI so far. The Committee gave a cautious welcome to the idea of an informal body drawing together business and academic figures with the Executive to promote research and development and creativity but believes that such a council would benefit from the additional input of trade union representatives.

Theme B relates to the identification and improvement of the provision of relevant workforce skills and tackling barriers to employment. It also encompasses the delivery of essential skills and foundation degree qualifications and the maintenance of tuition fees for students in higher education at current levels, subject only to inflationary increases. The Committee believes that the policy of keeping fees at the current level will encourage young people to enter into and remain in higher education, although the Department's ongoing review of widening participation in higher education is yet to highlight the underlying issues discouraging those from lower socio-economic backgrounds from accessing university education.

#### 11.00 am

The legal aspect of introducing a fee differential between Northern Ireland- and GB-domiciled students remains untested in a court of law. Similarly, the impact of a fee differential on student flows to and from the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain has yet to be determined. Such flows are not necessarily elective, and the Committee expressed concern regarding the situation of students who opt for courses, such as veterinary studies, which are not available in Northern Ireland.

The Committee supports the expansion of existing foundation degrees and the inception of foundation degrees under the apprenticeship scheme at levels 4 and 5 for engineering and ICT, which is to be introduced as a pilot scheme. The Committee also welcomes the focus on science, technology,

engineering and mathematics (STEM) through the draft economic strategy and notes that the relatively small number of additional places in higher education announced by the Minister recently is to be offered to STEM subjects. The Committee appreciates the vital economic role played by STEM subjects in achieving the goals set out in the Northern Ireland skills strategy. However, on a recent visit to the Queen's cancer research centre in Belfast, the Committee was concerned to learn of the reduction in funding for PhD students in such a vital area. The Committee was also disappointed to learn that DEL has been unable to secure funding under recent monitoring rounds to fund the run-through costs of the additional 300 PhD students recruited under the previous Programme for Government.

The Committee also heard from the DEL employment service on how it is developing tailor-made situations for employers to address their recruitment needs. The Committee endorses the close working relationship with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Invest NI in providing the cohesive approach for skills advocated in the draft strategy. The Committee expressed some concern that the role of timely and professional careers guidance had taken a higher priority in the strategy and that no specific targets in that area had been allocated to DEL in the related action plan. The Committee recognises that the provision of high-quality careers guidance is also vital for adults over the age of 16 in the existing workforce and those seeking employment.

The proposed Pathways to Success strategy to address the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) is included in the theme as an action to address barriers to employment and employability. The Committee fully endorses the need for the strategy and has urged the Department to expedite its development and implementation, the set target date for which is, of course, April 2012. The Committee has expressed concern about the protracted pace at which that is progressing and about the fact that the related research has not yet been completed.

The Committee was particularly concerned that the Minister indicated that there was no dedicated budget in the Department for the implementation of the NEETs strategy. The Committee also expressed concern that, under the same objective of tackling barriers to employment and employability, there is a specific priority for developing employment strategies for Belfast and Londonderry but there is no such provision for rural areas. The Committee, therefore, recommends that barriers to employment for people of all ages in rural areas, such as the cost and availability of public transport, should be given specific recognition in the strategy. Similarly, the Committee feels that measures to combat the impact of the downturn in the construction industry should also be included in the strategy. Members are concerned that that is having a disproportionate effect on rural towns —

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

**Mr Buchanan:** — and on areas where large numbers of young people are emigrating or are considering emigration.

I wished to raise other issues, but given the time, I cannot do so. We support the motion.

**Mr Doherty (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development):** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I speak as Deputy Chair of the Committee for Regional Development. I thank the Minister for bringing the economic strategy to the House.

It is telling that transport measures are contained in the economic strategy in such categories as "Competing in the Global Economy" and "Economic Infrastructure", because that, quite rightly, elevates them to an appropriate level. The transport sector is a very important component of the economy, as it impacts on the development and welfare of populations. When transport systems are efficient, they provide economic and social opportunities and benefits that result in positive multiplier effects, such as better accessibility to markets, employment, tourism and additional investment.

As far back as 1994, the World Bank Group, in a world development report, noted that the provision of infrastructure services to meet the demands of businesses, households and other users was one of the major challenges of economic development. It is, therefore, most welcoming to see transport infrastructure take a pivotal position in the strategy. I include the commitment to the abolition of air passenger duty as being a key ingredient of the transport mix.

Central to that are the road and rail networks. They are paramount to facilitating transport and are the base of any developed economy, as they constitute the heart of the supply chain. Roads are the crucial link between producers and their markets. The dense road network guarantees better access to customers. They are the backbone of the economy as they connect almost any location and guarantee cost-efficient delivery of goods and services and, importantly, transport of people.

With the Ceann Comhairle's permission, I will divert for a moment to ask the House and the Executive to take on board that the constituency that I represent, West Tyrone, and the constituency that the Minister represents, Fermanagh and South Tyrone, do not have one yard of a rail system. Nevertheless, the rail system will be key to facilitating access to major events, such as the Irish Open, the City of Culture and the Titanic celebrations. I, therefore, congratulate the Minister and her Executive colleagues for ensuring that investment in transport networks is included in the economic strategy. Investment in roads together with sustainable transport initiatives approaches £1 billion.

Obviously, concerns that I raised during the debate on the Programme for Government remain valid, particularly the reduction in capital funding for water infrastructure. Adequate investment in that area would also have met the objective of aiding the construction industry. However, just as the Committee has called on the Department to develop road schemes to shovel-ready status should additional investment become available, I also issue that challenge to NI Water. There is, of course, work to be done on its governance process, which might result in efficiencies for reinvestment. That should be a priority, particularly as the asset base will be increased should the measures for social and affordable housing in the economic strategy be implemented.

I can only reiterate the importance of transport infrastructure in positioning the North in the global marketplace. The very significant investment in that is essential to kick-starting

economic recovery. We have a strategy in place. Now, we need to see its measures being enacted. I am content that I and my Committee colleagues are keen to work with the Minister for Regional Development to ensure that those measures are implemented.

**Mrs Overend:** The economy is, rightly, the Executive's number-one priority. Therefore, the 'Economic Strategy' is one of the most important documents — if not the most important document — that the Assembly will scrutinise. I have looked at the strategy carefully. I welcome the opportunity to put forward my thoughts on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party as its enterprise, trade and investment spokesperson.

First, I want to deal with a particular issue: the consultation on the draft economic strategy closed on 22 February, and we are debating the economic strategy on 13 March. I assume that a wide range of responses was received from the business community, the community and voluntary sector and political parties, amongst others. Indeed, we heard that there were almost 100 responses. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment assured us that she took full account of all those responses in such a short time, and I assure her that I will read her responses with interest. Moreover, the fact that the updated document was only published yesterday leaves Members with little time to consider any changes.

The first substantive point that I want to raise about the document concerns job creation or, should I say, job promotion. The strategy sets out how 25,000 jobs can be promoted. That is the headline figure of the strategy, and one that could make a real difference to the lives of people in Northern Ireland. That figure is broken down as follows: 6,300 jobs from locally owned companies; 5,900 from inward investors; 6,500 from start-up businesses; and 6,300 from the jobs fund.

There are two ways of approaching that target. First, given that about 61,500 people are claiming unemployment benefit in Northern Ireland, we are saying, in effect, that people have less than a one in two chance of getting a job. That is not good enough. Secondly, given the failure of Invest Northern Ireland, its handing back of £38.1 million in the past two monitoring rounds and the relative failure of the jobs fund thus far, changes must occur if we are to meet the targets. Indeed, I understand that the Federation of Small Businesses considers that target to be aspirational. The Ulster Unionist Party will take a pragmatic approach to that target and will support and scrutinise to ensure delivery.

I want to consider the key sectors that are identified in the economic strategy.

**Mr Frew:** I thank the Member for giving way. Can the Member explain to the House how she can say that the work of Invest NI has been a failure? Was the return of the money not evidence of good governance? That money can now be spent in other areas, such as roads, which will help the economy in Northern Ireland. How does the Member see that as a failure?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute.

**Mrs Overend:** I have spoken to local businesses that have tried to get funding from Invest Northern Ireland. Considering the economic environment, I feel that Invest

Northern Ireland needs to be more flexible in how it hands out its money.

Moving on, again. I want to consider the key sectors that are identified in the economic strategy. The Ulster Unionist Party endorses the sectoral approach. Given the Budget reductions and the scarcity of resources across the board, it is important that we select the right areas to allocate sufficient resources to.

Given the context of the visual statement, the Ulster Unionist Party would have liked to have seen the construction industry on the list of key sectors. Construction is a fundamental industry in my constituency of Mid Ulster, and just last night, I chatted to a colleague who works in that industry. He told me that on his weekly early morning flights to England — I understand that that is where the majority of the work is these days — he counted between 12 and 16 other managers who are also travelling to England. Yes, I said "managers", which means that there are between 12 and 16 teams of construction workers in one particular area. However, for every construction company that travels to England, there is another at home in Northern Ireland.

Perhaps even more important, we should ensure that the sectors that are selected are adequately supported. In our response to the economic strategy, the Ulster Unionist Party took the creative industries as an example. Despite being a key sector, the creative industries innovation fund has been allocated less money over a shorter time, and despite the ongoing success of projects such as 'Game of Thrones', there is no mention of the screen industries or NI Screen in the economic strategy.

Tourism is another sector identified in the strategy, and it is fundamental as a key driver of the economy. We must take advantage of the unique circumstances that accompany the decade of centenaries and continue to build on the work of the five signature projects. However, if we are to reach the goals of the Programme for Government of increasing visitor numbers to 4.2 million and tourist revenue to £676 million by December 2014, a tourism strategy is a necessary requirement. We have a draft tourism strategy, and the Minister has indicated that the full strategy has been delayed due to the changed economic times. In order to maximise potential in this area, the Minister must bring forward an updated strategy as soon as possible.

#### 11.15 am

The Ulster Unionist Party has supported the devolution of corporation tax and played a major part in getting that important issue on the agenda. I welcome the fact that the economic strategy sets out the potential benefits of a reduction in corporation tax. That being said, however, we have still not established the cost to the Northern Ireland block grant of a reduction, with estimates from the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Treasury differing by nearly £200 million. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment recently attended the second joint ministerial working group meeting on rebalancing the economy. She could update the House today on whether there were any indications at that meeting of associated costs.

I am also mindful of the role that the third sector can play in rebuilding and rebalancing Northern Ireland's economy. I am keen to stress that that sector should not be underestimated. An example of that in my constituency of Mid Ulster is

Opportunities for Older People, which is an independent charity that works with and for older people and provides essential support services. The company's profits go back into supporting older people in the Cookstown area. We must provide substantial support to social enterprises such as that.

The strategy avoids a number of areas, including addressing the perception of Invest Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the role of banks in rebuilding the economy, the tendency to gold-plate EU regulations, and tensions with cross-border bodies, including Tourism Ireland and InterTradeIreland. Those issues need to be addressed if we are to make best use of Northern Ireland's economic potential.

In conclusion, I welcome the publication of the final economic strategy and reiterate that it is a fundamental document as we move forward. It must be delivered effectively, and for that reason, I ask the Minister how ongoing scrutiny will be achieved. I know that the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment will play an important role in that, but other formal mechanisms must be put in place.

**Mr Lunn:** The Alliance Party welcomes the publication of the strategy. We see it as a genuine attempt to plot the way forward for Northern Ireland plc, and we acknowledge the efforts of everybody involved in putting the document together. If it has taken a bit longer than some of us think it should have, well, that is government for you. In a way, the inevitable delays that we suffer in getting anything done here reinforce the need, as evidenced in the strategy, to involve the private sector fully and to give it the tools, incentives and freedom to operate, which is what the sector needs.

If, as a result of this document, the private sector can drive forward to produce jobs on the back of government-inspired training and education initiatives, which should be targeted following consultation with that sector and with the needs of industry, it will be deemed a success. The private sector lives in a different world from us; we live in the Stormont bubble here. The private sector would like to see things being done much more quickly than we ever seem to be able to do them and it would need no second bidding to make them happen.

The Northern Ireland entrepreneurial spirit, which produced great industries in the past, is very much alive and kicking, the difference being only in the types of products involved. I note the references in paragraph 1.14 to the growth areas of telecommunications and ICT, life and health sciences, agrifood, advanced materials and advanced engineering. In the same section, the document highlights the potential for business services and financial services — something close to my heart. In all those areas, if we can get our skills and training base right, the opportunities to build on what has already been achieved are vast.

I will not dwell on the contradiction between the need to produce skills and the current political moves to change the status of the Department that has been charged with producing those skills. Let me just record my surprise that anyone would consider that to be anything other than an ill-judged and hasty decision taken for entirely the wrong reasons and generally now recognised as such.

The strategy notes vaguely the need for co-operation and input between the private sector and government. I hope that that acknowledgement will translate into more than

a concept, and that serious consultation with the private sector will happen. This was envisaged way back in 2006 in an Alliance Party proposal — before I came along — for an economic forum consisting of independent economists, business representatives from across the board, voluntary sector leaders, trade unionists and political advisers, designed to come up with an economic strategy for the Executive to which all the parties could sign up.

The underlying ambition of such an approach was obvious. A strong Executive economic policy will inevitably mean economic reform, which will mean tough decisions, not all of which will be popular. However, civic buy-in and the establishment of an economic contract, if I can call it that, would enable such decisions to be made with broad support. Therefore, in supporting the strategy as far as it goes, I must say that it is a document that is written by public sector officials for the private sector. The need for private sector buy-in and consultation remains paramount, as we expressed six years ago.

I query whether the consultation, conducted over a holiday period alongside a raft of other complex documents, was really sufficient. I accept the Minister's comments that the framework of the document was put out to full consultation. We are where we are, and we will vote to support it.

One of the striking aspects of this and other initiatives is the fact that the Northern Ireland economy performed poorly after the Good Friday Agreement, in a situation that might be called a perfect storm. We had international goodwill, local peace, a booming Southern economy, strong growth in public spending and sound global economic growth. In the face of all that, our economy performed no better than average, and it probably should have done better. That is why we argued for a proper economic agreement that could be set alongside the political agreements of 1998 and 2006, and I would like to see that emerge from this document. I would never want to give the impression of talking Northern Ireland down. There have been recent well-documented successes in the area of the arts and sports. We have world-class companies such as Almac, Norbrook and Wrightbus. The Minister mentioned CEM Systems and Muldoon Transport Systems, and Mivan comes to mind. We have nothing to be ashamed of. We will have to learn from the past, and you will find little, if any, reference to the economy in the text of any of our political agreements. The lessons are there for us.

As Mr Maginness did, I highlight the potential of the green new deal. I really wish that we could come up with a different title for that, but we all at least know what it means by now. I wonder why some of us find our eyes glazing over when the green new deal is mentioned. Perhaps the Minister will tell us her attitude to that later. Given our ideal placement to benefit from our natural resources and geographical situation, the potential for jobs is enormous, yet we are falling behind our international and European competitors, who invested heavily in that area in the aftermath of the economic downturn of 2008. In the areas of renewable energy, wind and wave power, energy from waste, biomass and the retrofitting of our housing stock, there are opportunities for the construction industry and our agriculture sector that have enormous job creation potential. I saw a recent survey that talked about 30,000 potential jobs. I do not know whether that is accurate, no more than I know whether some of the other job creation figures that are mentioned in the strategy are achievable, but we have to take note of a report

that indicates such massive potential. Therefore, I wonder whether the figure of £12 million that is mentioned in the strategy gives sufficient priority to that area.

Lastly, I did not intend to mention Invest NI, but Mrs Overend and Mr Frew mentioned it. Invest NI is a success story. It has had its ups and downs and has had to return some money this year and last year, and that is a pity. The strategy contains some mention of a bit more flexibility and a bit more room for innovation with Invest NI and how it uses its money. I really hope that that can be developed, because we need Invest NI or something very like it. We will, of course, support the strategy.

**Mr Frew:** We come to the Chamber today with reality about where we are economically in our country and, indeed, the world. Indeed, on Friday past, I spoke to some constituents whom I have known all my life and who I have known to be in work all their working life. They came to me seeking help and advice on being unemployed for the first time in their life. They do not really know where to go, who to speak to or how to avail themselves of benefits or seek out further work. So, when we talk in this House, we should always be mindful of the effects that the economic downturn is having on our population.

I am sure that no one in the House needs to be reminded about my links with the construction industry and how it has been hurt over the past number of years by the economic downturn. There are tradesmen out there who are struggling to get work and have had to go abroad to find work at not very good pay. We all know about the pressures at the minute on our retailers in our town and city centres, and that was highlighted today.

All those people I talk about, whether it be my constituents who are out of work for the first time, the tradesmen whom I have worked with for many years or the retailers who own shops in our towns and city centres, tell me one message consistently, which is that when we are in this Chamber or are doing press, we should make sure that we are positive. The message must go out from this House today that we are positive about our economy, are confident that we can do the job of work that we have to do and can perform to assist growth in our business community to make it take off in ways that it never has before. There will be opportunities out there for our businesses and our people.

It really irks me when I hear Members in this Chamber being so negative just for the sake of it and just to see whether they can maybe squeeze out a press statement to rubbish something in the economic strategy.

**Mrs Overend:** I agree that we have to be positive and have to give a positive signal to the Northern Ireland community, but Northern Ireland will thank us for ensuring that we can scrutinise what is being done by this Executive to make sure that we are doing the best that we can.

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

**Mr Frew:** The Member will know, as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, that she will get the chance to scrutinise this, as we all will.

The Member said that the construction industry was not mentioned or named as a priority in the document. Let

me read out some of the commitments in this economic strategy. It states:

*"Maintain, manage and improve the road network with an aim of reducing journey times on key transport corridors"*

Will that not assist the construction industry?

*"Improve the strategic transport network by the advancement and completion of a range of major works projects"*

Will that not help the construction industry?

*"Develop Regional Sports Stadiums by 2015 as agreed with the IFA, GAA and Ulster Rugby"*

Will that not help construction?

*"Legislate to modernise the planning system, resulting in faster decisions on planning applications, faster and fairer appeals, and stronger and simpler enforcement"*

Will that not help the construction industry?

*"Maintain and improve the Health and Education Estate infrastructure"*

Will that not assist the construction industry?

Maybe some Members in this Chamber think that we are falling down because the document does not mention "the construction industry" in every bullet point. In case people did not realise, on page 84, the construction industry is named. It aims to:

*"Help the construction industry by delivering key road and rail projects and approximately 8,000 social and affordable homes over the budget period"*

I do not see how that could be any clearer. The strategy will assist the construction industry and all our industries.

I will move on to agrifood, which is sprinkled right across the economic strategy. Some of the commitments for the agrifood industries are as follows: to provide funding of up to £3 million a year for new R&D projects through the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute research programme; to secure up to £5.6 billion additional investment in agrifood R&D through the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's (DARD) research challenge fund by March 2015; to ensure the adoption of at least 1,500 technologies in the land-based and food sectors on an annual basis; and to continue to invest £18 million a year in education, knowledge and technology transfer to the land-based food and rural sectors.

### 11.30 am

The strategy helps not only the construction industry and our exporters but our agrifood businesses, which have done a tremendous job over the last number of years and were supported by the Assembly when they did not really need support because they could do it on their own. We, as a Government, have to be careful that we do not get down, deep and dirty, into business when businesses sometimes just want to be left alone in order to grow the way they would like.

We have to be confident and assured that what we can produce in a document, we can deliver. I am confident that we can do

that and that the Minister who will be in charge of it can do it, but, of course, other Departments have to weigh in, too.

Yesterday, I was scathing of our Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for not having targets that are ambitious and can really stretch our resolve in this. I believe that we have targets, and we have increased targets from the draft economic strategy to make it harder for us to achieve. Why? Because we think we can and because we need to. We need to be progressive and ambitious, because that is what our private sector is. It is positive and ambitious, so we, as a Government, must be the same.

A strong economy is vital to the future prosperity of Northern Ireland and its people. We need to be positive and in a position to deliver and to help businesses take off when they are able to do so. I believe that the economic strategy does that. It lays down the platform and the runway for our businesses to take off. There is no doubt that export-led economic growth will be the key in all that, and it is right that the Minister and the strategy target and prioritise that, because that will bring greater things to Northern Ireland. It will bring growth and wealth to our people.

I say that because it is not just about making wealth or making people rich. It is about enhancing people's confidence, helping them to become healthier in spirit, mind and body, and giving them a greater standard of living. Even the most socialist among us should realise how important the economy is to providing all of that to our people. With wealth comes all things. I believe that it will help our education, and it will certainly help our health and our waiting lists and everything else along with that, if we can get people into productive working. That is something that we must ensure happens. We must increase the confidence of our people and our businesses at this time.

**Mr Flanagan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an straitéis eacnamaíochta atá anseo inniu. As Sinn Féin's enterprise spokesperson, I warmly welcome the publication of the economic strategy. The achievement of the challenging targets that are set out in it will ensure a real and meaningful difference in the day-to-day lives of the citizens we represent. That is not to say that there are not things that I still believe are missing from the strategy and that could still be actioned over the course of this mandate, but I am satisfied with the main thrust of the strategy, particularly with regard to the ambitious targets that have been set for job creation over the next number of years.

Once again our society is being blighted with emigration. Many commentators have focused on the huge numbers of people who are leaving the South, but the reality is that the situation is not much better in the North. At least 500 people leave every week and, unless something radically changes, that will simply continue and we will have another lost generation of Irish men and women dotted around the globe. Hopefully, the publication of the economic strategy will help us to turn that corner and provide a bit of hope to our society. What Mr Frew has just said with regard to people being positive is right. One of the major problems we face is not just about a lack of jobs but about a lack of hope in our society. We need to be here as leaders and to deliver that hope.

History tells us that it is often our best and brightest who leave our shores and embark on a new life elsewhere.

They often achieve great success, fame and fortune. We should do everything in our power to keep as many of our most able people as we can here to help us to begin the process of rebuilding our economy. What was largely a construction boom on this island saw huge dependence on private residential development to keep our young people in work. Too many people embarked on education courses that were suited to that boom. That boom has well and truly gone, but we still have those skills and we still have many of those young people, with all of their drive and determination, who want to make a difference and make something of themselves. We need to facilitate their transfer from traditional construction employment and skills to growing sectors such as renewable energy, where there are huge opportunities if we can simply tap into the global market properly.

In order to identify such traits and opportunities, Sinn Féin believes that we need to see an Executive-led job creation strategy, which would join the work of all Departments and arm's-length bodies and work with the private sector to create a single programme designed to create much-needed jobs for our citizens. Without such a focused strategy, Departments will continue to be allowed to operate in silos, which rarely delivers for our people.

One of the huge problems that faces our local economy is the sheer cost of doing business. If we are serious about expecting our indigenous business base to expand, begin exporting and compete in the global market, we need to reduce its operating costs and improve its level of competitiveness. That can be done through a range of measures that should be explored. Of course, the devolution of corporation tax is one of those, but it is only one of a number of options.

Huge energy costs are crippling local businesses, regardless of their size. I welcome the proposals of the Minister concerning the renewable heat incentive, but I have concerns that the tariffs here are much lower than were previously announced for a similar scheme in Britain.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I thank the Member for giving way. On the issue of access to energy, does the Member share my concern that there is no commitment in the document to expanding access to the natural gas network?

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

**Mr Flanagan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The expansion of the natural gas network is a clear policy that the Executive are looking at. I do not know whether that can be delivered in the time frame of this strategy; it is another thing. I am happy for the Minister to come back on that point.

Rises in regressive taxation measures such as VAT are having a massive impact on our local economy. Proposals have been brought forward by employers' groups about reductions in national insurance contributions for new employees for a short period. However, as an Executive and an Assembly, we do not have the power to implement those proposals. The Finance Minister has shown a clear lack of willingness to pursue any measure that might give us greater fiscal autonomy. If we are serious about delivering for our citizens, we need to see the devolution of all fiscal and economic levers to the Assembly, with decisions being taken by local Ministers.

The economic strategy is lacking in proposals for greater all-Ireland co-operation and the benefits that would derive from it. I do not make that as a political point. One practical example, which should not present a political difficulty for anyone in the House, is that, right around the globe, there is huge duplication and competition between Invest NI and IDA Ireland in where they locate offices and base staff. Surely, with greater integration between those organisations, huge sums of money could be saved, which could then be put back directly in to creating jobs.

**Mr Frew:** Does the Member agree that although there are times when we can tie up with our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland, there are times when we have to compete against the Republic of Ireland? It is very important that although we are a large economy in this world, being the UK, we, as Northern Ireland, go out there and sell our own wares and do our own business deals, rather than relying on a neighbouring state. I point out to the Member looking towards a neighbouring state that we have an unemployment rate in Northern Ireland of 7.2%. The Republic of Ireland has an unemployment rate of 14.6%. Does the Member agree that that is not somewhere where we would like to go?

**Mr Flanagan:** I thank the Member for his intervention. It all depends on what he wants to go for. If he wants to seek a job, it is definitely not the place to go. However, if he wants to benefit from higher levels of innovation and foreign direct investment, it is somewhere that we need to co-operate with. I do not make the point for political reasons. I have no problem with co-operating with anybody. If we are to see increases in foreign direct investment and more businesses locating here, we need to see greater opportunities explored. I suggest that Invest NI and IDA work better together in where they locate offices, because huge sums of money could be saved. At this stage, they can run separate organisations, which, as an Irish republican, I do not agree with. However, in the short term, there is no problem with the two of them working out of the same office and having the same staff doing the same job. That would present massive savings for the Executive and is something that I seriously think should be explored.

I will touch next on an issue that was raised by the Committee Chair — the green new deal and the lack of reference to a “retrofitting” programme, as Trevor Lunn appears not to be satisfied with the title “green new deal”, or has at least identified that others are not satisfied with it. The lack of reference to such a programme is also worrying. Perhaps, in closing the debate, the Minister will outline her Department’s plans for the green new deal or similar scheme. Such a retrofitting scheme could improve people’s homes, reduce our energy usage and, at the same time, leverage funds from the private sector to create much needed construction jobs.

I want to raise concerns about support for businesses in financial difficulty but that remain viable. The trait across government seems to be that Departments do not intervene until too late. For example, the Rivers Agency cannot take action to stop a river becoming blocked until it becomes blocked. I would like to see government agencies play a more proactive role and put in place an emergency task force to assist firms in financial difficulty. Such interventions may prove to be as useful as creating new jobs.

The strategy’s commitments to broadband and telecommunications are also welcome, with every premises guaranteed an internet connection of at least 2 megabit per second. Moving on from that, we need to see more fairness in the price paid by people in different areas. The prices paid by people in rural Fermanagh and in greater Belfast are not the same. Ofcom’s proposals to auction the 4G mobile phone licence presents us with an opportunity to ensure that all communities have access to adequate mobile phone coverage and high-speed mobile broadband. However, with a target of coverage for 98% of the population across Britain and the North, many in my constituency will remain without coverage. So, what we should push for —

**Mr Speaker:** The Member’s time is almost gone.

**Mr Flanagan:** — is coverage based on each postcode district.

**Mr Dunne:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the economic strategy, which is an important issue for everyone in Northern Ireland. Although there is no doubt that we and the rest of the world live in difficult financial conditions, there is room for optimism. The economic strategy provides a positive, progressive and practical road map for the long-term growth of our economy.

I commend the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister for leading on this significant document and for the work that she and her Department have done to date; I also commend the job creation targets that they have set. Some criticise those targets as being too ambitious, but it is important to set challenging targets that we aspire to achieving. Everyone recognises that we need actively to seek ways of growing, rebalancing and rebuilding our economy, and the strategy certainly seeks to do that.

We have much to be optimistic about, not least our potentially great tourism industry. Often referred to as a year of opportunity for Northern Ireland, this year is exactly that. I am sure that we all look forward to the opening, shortly, of the Titanic signature project, which highlights all that is good about Northern Ireland and promises to be an example of how to turn a negative story into an exciting and progressive project. Tourism has begun to play an ever increasing role locally; I trust that we will continue to maximise its potential. More than ever, we are now in a position to promote Northern Ireland, the brand. It is also vital to put in place the right infrastructure for tourism to flourish to its potential.

Golf tourism has great potential, with our home-grown champions, including world number 1, Rory McIlroy. We in north Down want to gain from the spin-off. With Rory’s home course being Holywood, North Down Borough Council is already trying to maximise tourism opportunities in a project that has great potential.

**11.45 am**

There is also huge potential to grow our export base. Given that we are not large enough to rely solely on domestic markets, we need to actively grow and expand our export base both to developed and developing countries throughout the world. I know of one local architect in my constituency, North Down, who went on a recent trade mission to Kurdistan and greatly benefited from his visit. That is just one region where great potential markets exist for local businesses to export to.



I am glad that tackling barriers to employment is a central theme of the strategy and I welcome the ongoing work of the social investment fund, which I trust will be of great practical benefit to areas that suffer high unemployment and deprivation. I also welcome the commitment in the strategy to deliver 6,000 work experience and training opportunities for young people by 2015 in priority sectors. Employers also need incentives to start apprenticeships and give young people purpose, discipline and a reason to go to work. Business support is also crucial to grow our economy.

One area of concern that was brought to my attention recently is that crime is one of the main barriers to running a successful business. Unfortunately, crime can have a crippling effect on businesses and is often underestimated as one of the major barriers to business growth and sustainability. Energy costs continue to be yet another barrier to business growth and we need to do all we can to minimise the ever-increasing costs of energy supplies and ensure competition right across the spectrum. Alternative supplies such as renewables and a further extension of the gas network are realistic measures that will help to grow our economy. Electricity costs are excessive and that highlights the need for progress on the North/South interconnector.

I also welcome the £50 million growth loan fund set up by Invest NI to help our small businesses, particularly those that are keen to export but are often unable to access funding through our non-risk-taking banks. That will provide crucial financial support to those companies, which are keen to take that risk to remain sustainable and competitive.

More support is needed to allow companies, universities and colleges easier access to R&D funding. During the ongoing Enterprise Committee inquiry into R&D funding in Northern Ireland we learned that many firms, large and small, have not availed of themselves of the European funding through framework programme 7. They see the process as too difficult, restrictive and not worth the effort, and we are losing out in access to European funding for R&D. An alternative system is required and the new tranche of funding, Horizon 2020, must be smarter and more accessible to manufacturers and service providers.

**Mr A Maginness:** I thank the Member for giving way. He raises a very important point about Horizon 2020 and access to those funds. Does he agree that it is now up to the Executive to use all their energy and authority to influence the development of that fund so that we have an accessible fund for local businesses in Northern Ireland?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member has an added minute.

**Mr Dunne:** I thank the Chair of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee for his comments. I agree with him wholly. The evidence to date is significant, and the Horizon 2020 fund must be put in place in a way that is smart and attractive to our local businesses. We have clear evidence that that is not the case with present funding.

We need to continue to invest in infrastructure, and recent announcements on improving roads infrastructure and the investment in our hospitals is good news for everyone. I trust that we will continue to see positive announcements that will be followed up on the ground by delivery, sooner rather than later. Northern Ireland has a lot of attributes and skills already in place to help us to grow the economy. It is important that we continue to build on what has already been

achieved and look forward to a positive and economically vibrant Northern Ireland in the future. I support the economic strategy and commend Minister Foster in her commitment to deliver for Northern Ireland.

**Mrs Dobson:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on this economic strategy, and I congratulate the Minister on bringing it forward.

Although rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy at a time of sustained uncertainty will be no easy task, I am encouraged by the Minister's statements that the overarching goal of the strategy is to improve the economic competitiveness of the local economy. I have called on the Executive to create a strategy targeted at developing the economic potential offered across rural Northern Ireland. This strategy does that to an extent. However, I urge the Minister to work closely with her Executive colleagues to ensure that this is not merely a papering-over exercise.

As my party's spokesperson on agriculture and rural development, I can see great potential yet to be realised in the agrifood and wider rural sector in driving economic growth, creating wealth and providing much-needed private sector employment. The agricultural sector has an annual output of some £1.5 billion and is one of Northern Ireland's largest employers when taken together with the production and processing industries. The agrifood sector alone sustains one in five private sector jobs in Northern Ireland. Indeed, it is one of the Northern Ireland economy's greatest strengths, and we should be seeking to exploit it constructively at every opportunity.

There is great potential to be realised within agriculture and the agrifood sector with regard to driving economic growth, creating wealth and providing much-needed private sector employment. With a coherent, forward-looking strategy, the agrifood sector has the ability to rebuild and rebalance the Northern Ireland economy by creating jobs, encouraging research, increasing exports and improving our economic competitiveness as well as helping to ensure more balanced sub-regional growth.

Education and skills are an important part of that process. We need to have people equipped with the correct skills for the sector, while a diverse agrifood sector will increase opportunities and, potentially, increase participation in the education system, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

There is recognition of a need to fund studentships, and, in that, we lag behind our competitors in the Republic of Ireland, who annually fund 120 studentships compared with only eight funded by DARD. Graduates in agrifood-related subjects are highly sought after, and intense competition between businesses means that those individuals are highly employable and have good prospects.

Within agriculture and the agrifood sector, we already have some of Northern Ireland's most innovative entrepreneurs and businesses. As was mentioned in the economic strategy, innovation is a key part of moving forward to a more economically diverse and prosperous Northern Ireland.

The European Commission recently published its annual research and innovation scoreboard, which uses 25 indicators to assess how successfully member states foster research and development and how quickly that is

translated into products and services in the marketplace. Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden were deemed to be the best innovators and made up the first of four groups, referred to as innovation leaders. The UK and nine other member states followed in the second tier, which contained the so-called innovation followers.

The study showed that although the EU is improving in how it fosters innovation, the rate of improvement is slowing. The EU continues to lag behind international leaders such as Japan, the USA and South Korea. Furthermore, countries such as China, Brazil and India have become more competitive over the past five years and are rapidly closing the gap between them and more-developed nations.

In an increasingly globalised world, where the pace of change is ever increasing, it is vital that Northern Ireland strives to become an innovation leader. That requires co-operation between government, the academic sector and industry to harness all the skills we have in research and innovation and successfully translate that research to the marketplace. Improving how we draw down European funds from the likes of FP7 and its planned successor Horizon 2020, which was mentioned earlier — programmes specifically designed to increase innovation and global competitiveness in the EU — is a key part of such a strategy. We have not been getting our fair share of these funds. There are tens of billions of euro on offer, and the Northern Ireland Executive's efforts to address this vital engagement are to be encouraged. This is needed for increasing our drawdown as per the Barroso task force recommendations.

The Commission's proposed reforms for the common agricultural policy (CAP) post-2013 have a competitiveness agenda, with a focus on improving research and development, innovation and knowledge transfer. The existing proposals are that rural development funding is channelled into improving communication to help close the gap between the scientists and the farmers who are actually involved in the production of the food. There is an opportunity to feed into how that funding is designed, and by engaging now we can help to ensure that the end result is more appropriate to the needs of the industry.

The recent creation of the Agri-food Strategy Board goes some way towards recognising the importance of the agrifood sector in Northern Ireland. The Ulster Unionist Party believes that bringing a strategic, holistic approach to this part of the economy will pay dividends. Indeed, the economy as a whole would benefit from such an approach. However, the existence of such a body is, in itself, no guarantee that the agrifood sector here can achieve its full potential. Past incarnations have often had their recommendations left sitting on a shelf gathering dust.

Given the current economic realities, it is vital that this time around the Agri-food Strategy Board is industry-led and is given all the tools necessary to drive expansion, develop new products and tap into new markets. We do not have far to look in order to see what can be achieved when it comes to agrifood. In the Republic of Ireland, Bord Bia is working towards targets set out in the Food Harvest 2020 strategy, which aims to grow food and drink exports by 40% by 2020. Scotland Food and Drink has an ambitious target of growing food output by 60% through its strategy, 'A Land of Food and Drink'.

Ambitious targets are needed for the agrifood industry in Northern Ireland. Put simply: given the need for Northern Ireland to drive private sector enterprise and growth and pick up the slack from the public sector, an ambitious strategy must be developed and implemented without further delay. This economic strategy is a welcome recognition, albeit far too late, of the opportunities for our local rural economy.

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

**Mrs Dobson:** I hope that the Minister takes on board the comments being made here today. However, for now, I congratulate her for her commitment shown thus far.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this very important strategy for the local economy. As other Members have said, there are a number of sectors, a number of green shoots, in the economy — the agrifood and tourism sectors. There are a lot of opportunities that we need to avail ourselves of.

We should not underestimate the challenges that we face, and we should face up to them in a positive way. There is rising youth unemployment. One of the starkest images I saw in recent weeks was the queue outside the RDS for a conference on employment abroad, in places such as Canada and Australia. There were people from across the island at that event. So, it is a challenge. There are people from my community, particularly in construction and from construction backgrounds, who are going to Australia in increasing numbers.

However, we should not be too negative, as Members have said. We should recognise the challenges that are there for us. As far as construction is concerned, we need a long-term plan not just for regaining the momentum that construction had, to a certain extent, and regaining employment within construction, but for ensuring that, for those coming through the education system, communication between the colleges and business enables the appropriate skill sets to come out of that system to meet the needs of the local economy. Ultimately, this is what will help to stem the flow of young people to other countries.

The education system is an important and key economic driver. GCSE figures are improving, and we should aim to better those figures. We need to close the skills gap with the top-performing Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.

## 12.00 noon

I welcome the mention of STEM in the strategy. It is identified as a key rebalancing measure. The Enterprise Committee went to the South Eastern Regional College and had a presentation from Ken Webb and Thompson Keating on the environmental skills centre. It is a great example of the strong relationships between further education and the renewables and environmental sector. It flagged up how we can create jobs, build economic growth and gain social benefits and, possibly, benefits in respect of fuel poverty. We were told that we should take a focused approach. There are construction workers who have many years of experience and skill sets that would fit perfectly into certain parts of the renewables industry. We have to match those construction workers, who are out of work but have those skill sets, to employment opportunities in the renewables industry.

The economic strategy is vital to tackling disadvantage, which is a primary focus of the Programme for Government. The full potential of economic development needs to be realised and explored. As other Members said, there is a lack of detail on the green new deal. There is a need to look at regional inequalities and the mutual benefits of North/South initiatives. I will go back to the example of the relationship between the South Eastern Regional College and the renewables industry. It is exploring opportunities across the island from Cork to Donegal. I am sure that there are also east-west linkages. We should not cut off our nose to spite our face in respect of North/South links, east-west links or whatever. The economy does not recognise any border. We need to explore all opportunities to ensure that we have economic growth in our communities.

What is missing is the ambition for the Assembly to gain more economic levers. As time goes on, everyone sees, more and more, the benefits of having at our disposal economic tools in respect of, for example, air passenger duty and corporation tax. A more recent example that I raised with the Minister is the visa waiver scheme in the South. It has benefits in attracting to the South tourists from Asian countries who are coming from the North and Britain. That is not in place vice versa. To be fair to the Minister, she raised the issue with the British Secretary of State. However, what we have always found with the British Secretary of State and direct rule Ministers is that they do not respond with any great urgency. We know that Ministers here will act urgently on economic matters. If those powers rested here, that issue could have been resolved by now. There needs to be a greater debate about the variety of available economic levers. We need to take a mature approach because, ultimately, the strategy is about benefiting our communities and creating employment and economic growth. If those levers lead to greater economic growth for our people and communities, we need to grasp them, regardless of what the British Government have to say.

SMEs play a substantially beneficial role for the public sector and the economy as a whole. Social clauses should absolutely be introduced into all public contracts.

I welcome the commitment to increase visitor numbers to 4.2 million and tourist revenue to £676 million by December 2014. The latest figures show that tourism in the North forms 4.9% of GDP and 4.7% of all jobs. We can all agree that we can increase those percentages significantly. The north coast is a good news story, but it could be a better news story if we had more hotels in Ballycastle, for example. We will return to that issue later. Golf tourism, the Giant's Causeway visitor centre and all of that will lead to further employment, revenue and economic growth in that part of the North. There needs to be further joined-up working across the north coast. Look across to Donegal: there are twice as many hotels there as there are in Belfast. Obviously, there are difficulties in respect of tourism there, but we should not fail to recognise that there are opportunities in respect of the tourist traffic that goes to Donegal. We need to bring that traffic across the north coast to benefit north Derry and north Antrim. Therefore, we need to take a look at that and ensure that the infrastructure is in place.

**Mr Dallat:** Does the Member agree that it would be a massive step forward for the Assembly to assume responsibility for the financing of the Greencastle to Magilligan ferry, which brings loads of tourists to Northern Ireland but is currently tied up

because of lack of agreement between this Assembly, Dáil Éireann and local councils?

**Mr McKay:** Absolutely, and that goes for all forms of transport — the A5, the A6, the Atlantic corridor in the west of Ireland and, of course, the A26. We need to decrease travel times between Dublin and the north coast, and we need to decrease travel times between the Belfast airports and Ballycastle, Portrush etc. As the Member for West Tyrone said, investment in construction, roads and infrastructure is an economic multiplier, and we should not fail to realise that.

I am conscious of time, so I will conclude by saying that economic growth is vital for raising standards of living, and it can be used to address social inequalities, which will improve everyone's quality of life. However, it is important that we have a mature approach to the economic debate in respect of North/South opportunities and opportunities between this island and the neighbouring island. We need to grasp all those opportunities. The business community is still ahead of many politicians in that regard, and we need to catch up.

**Mrs D Kelly:** The SDLP broadly welcomes the economic strategy, which has, as its central core, the rebuilding and rebalancing of the economy, with an emphasis on supporting job creation, innovation and exports. We believe that it is the right overall approach, and we draw a clear distinction between the economic strategy, which is a decent effort overall, and the Programme for Government, which is simply not up to standard. However, we also acknowledge the difficult challenges that face the Northern Ireland Executive and, in particular, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment during this period of unprecedented global recession. Only yesterday, a report by the Ulster Bank noted that business activity has weakened in recent months, which indicates that we are still in recession.

The coming onslaught of welfare cuts, which is predicted to result in a loss of £110 million to the Northern Ireland economy — money which, as we all know, given the nature of welfare payments, is additional to the Northern Ireland block grant — can only have an adverse impact on our local economy. When you take that into account, alongside the large-scale job losses that are anticipated as a consequence of the budget cuts in health and education, a very bleak picture is painted indeed. Therefore, there is a responsibility on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to deliver a job creation strategy that also ensures equality in this time of austerity.

Other Members, yesterday and today, have noted the importance of collaboration and co-operation across the Northern Ireland Executive. That is critical if we are to do the best for the people we represent.

We are pleased to see that the final document has taken on some of the SDLP's good ideas, in particular our call for a financial capability strategy for consumers. We also welcome a higher level of ambition for the economy in setting higher targets. The SDLP called for greater priority and recognition for tourism in the economic strategy. That is reflected in the higher targets for visitor numbers and visitor spend. However, it is unclear whether that increased ambition is to be backed by additional resources. Perhaps the Minister might clarify that.

The higher targets for investment by locally owned companies and externally owned businesses are also to be welcomed, but are those targets to be supported by additional resources? The increased targets for exports and increased spend on research and development are also positive changes.

As I said, the strategy was quite good to begin with, and it has improved as a result of the consultation. I trust that it will be a living document that will be subject to monitoring, evaluation and amendment during its lifetime. However, at the outset, there are deficiencies that the SDLP wishes to point out to the Minister and to the Executive. I hope that my comments will be taken in the spirit in which they are made. They are also reflected in the contributions of some of the key stakeholders, not least the CBI.

The scale and challenge of access to finance, for instance, is well recognised. Although we welcome the £50 million loan fund, we do not think it is sufficient. There are distinct challenges facing the Northern Ireland economy, such as the implications of NAMA and other legacy issues from the 2000-07 property boom, which left a disproportionately distressed property market; the lack of an indigenous banking sector, with key lending decisions taken outside Northern Ireland; and a weak and underfunded venture capital market. Therefore, there is a need to improve, as much as possible, access to finance. I ask the Minister, in collaboration with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, to look at how small businesses, particularly those in rural areas, might be assisted to access soft loans, so that they can draw down European funding under the rural development programme. That would be critical to our rural economy.

We recognise that the central plank of the economy has to be about rebalancing from the public to the private sector. However, the strategy refers to only one half of that equation: growing the private sector. There is nothing about the reform or restructuring of the public sector. The strategy is to take us to 2030, after all, so it should not be silent on public sector issues, such as water reform. Leaving public sector reform to the Programme for Government, as if it is nothing to do with the economy, is a complete and utter cop-out. With regard to water reform, we would like to see engagement with the SDLP mutualisation proposal.

Alongside the higher output targets for tourism, the economic strategy should have committed more resources to investment in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's signature projects.

Apart from corporation tax, there is no commitment in this long-term strategy to further devolution or further freedom around tax-varying powers. Those could be vital economic levers into the future.

The Minister will know that it is important that there is a childcare strategy sitting alongside the economic strategy, because it will help it work. It is important that there is an affordable and accessible childcare strategy, particularly for women returners, because we know that women still have the main responsibility for childcare. It is disappointing that we do not yet see a strident childcare strategy. I note with concern that, although a commitment was given to ring-fence £12 million for childcare, the figure given in the draft Programme for Government was £9 million. We are concerned that £3 million has been set aside for this

year and may or may not be lost. We would welcome any comment from the Minister on that.

Other Members talked about youth unemployment. Contributors talked about the importance of education, the skills strategy and meeting the needs of industry, particularly growth industry. There is also a cry for greater assistance from Invest NI with regard to the export market and the need for greater market intelligence. It was also said that not all of Invest NI's workload should be committed towards the start-up but should look at the needs of medium-sized enterprises. Greater commitment to that would be very much welcomed.

Despite our criticisms, we see this as a good attempt at an economic strategy, especially compared with previous efforts. That is probably because those who knew something about the economy were given their head, and the document was protected from more cynical influences at the centre. If we give OFMDFM's first draft of the CSI strategy one out of 10 and the Programme for Government three out of 10, the DETI economic strategy is a good six out of 10, and we look forward to its implementation.

#### 12.15 pm

**Mr G Robinson:** I commend the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on her efforts for Northern Ireland and its economy to date and thank her in anticipation of more success to come, in tandem with all our recent sporting achievements and tourist achievements, namely the Titanic Quarter, the new Bushmills golf course and the Causeway centre, to name a few. All Members should be proud of them. They are projects that have created much-needed employment in our construction industry.

In the development of an economic strategy for Northern Ireland, a balancing act was undertaken to ensure that small and medium-sized local businesses do not lose out to multinationals. The Minister and the Executive have done an excellent job in protecting local SMEs from some of the economic crisis to date and have pledged continuing support for them. That is a major part of our strategy. Keeping regional rates low and the creation of a loan fund to help cash flow for SMEs will hopefully result in the expansion of firms and will definitely secure a short-term future for endangered jobs. That is a positive element of the economic strategy that the Minister and Executive are following. This, though, cannot be the sole basis for the economic future that many of us desire to see. Foreign investment is part of it. Inward investment is essential. That has to work alongside our local businesses, but not to their detriment. The only way that that can be satisfactorily dealt with is through good communication. Only two weeks ago, the Minister took time out from her busy schedule and came to Limavady to speak to some of our local businesspeople. That is how an approach from the ground up has been undertaken and implemented. The Minister listens to the concerns and needs of our local business sector. I commend the Minister for that, as it lets businesspeople throughout Northern Ireland realise that they can be heard at the highest level by a proactive local Minister who is working for our entire business sector.

The Executive and the Minister have adopted a strategy that is adaptable, positive and, best of all, workable. Due to the adaptable nature of the strategy, it is an evolving thing,

changing as and when necessary. I urge every Member to get behind the strategy. Investors will watch and listen to debates such as this, so division and argument in the House will do Northern Ireland no favours. We must be positive in our outlook for our entire business sector, as my colleague Paul Frew said not so long ago.

**Ms J McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I start by welcoming the opportunity to speak in the debate and broadly welcoming the economic strategy. I really welcome the commitment by the Executive, yesterday in the Programme for Government and today in the economic strategy, to build a strong economy and to deliver a better quality of life for all our people. I welcome their commitment to ensure that the wealth and prosperity that is achieved through that will be used to reduce poverty, promote equality and tackle existing patterns of disadvantage and need.

Some people have already mentioned the gaps in the strategy. I do not want to concentrate too much on that — I want to stay positive — but there are gaps. There could be more in the strategy about achieving tax-varying powers for the Executive. The benefits of all-island economic initiatives have been missed to some degree, as has the green new deal. That said, I see that there is a commitment to preventative spending and early intervention spending. It is not actually mentioned, but some of the initiatives include that.

I especially welcome the inclusion of social clauses in public procurement contracts for construction, services and supplies. That is a key achievement. It presents the Executive with a real opportunity to address economic and social inequalities while promoting sustainability. It also helps in the regeneration of communities. However, we have to go further and look for a clearer definition of social clauses. I do not think that that is there yet. Contractors entering into the contracts need to be sure that they are adhering to the social clauses. That needs to be strictly monitored.

Most Members have already talked about it, and job creation is probably the key priority of the Executive at the moment. We cannot build our economy in any way unless we create jobs for people. We also need to sustain the jobs that are already there. We all recognise the need for foreign direct investment. However, we also have to look at the development of our local small and medium-sized businesses and the social economy sector. For instance, there is a huge opportunity to develop R&D if we go out and target proactively, and those local enterprises could become more involved in export markets. There are opportunities, particularly as regards export markets, and, therefore, we need to focus on that.

I welcome the focus on the connection between business and the further education sector. Recently, members of the ETI Committee visited one of the regional colleges and saw at first hand how that works for young people, in particular. Young people go into the colleges to train and get skills. Businesses work in partnership with the colleges, and, hopefully, those young people secure jobs after their training. That is a good demonstration of how the connection works in practical ways.

We need to look at how we tackle educational underachievement. Many of our young people from disadvantaged backgrounds still have little or no hope of securing work or

even further education or training, and we have debated that many times in the Chamber. However, 80% of that comes from outside the classroom. It is not just about what those young people do at school or in the classroom; it is also about what happens in their life outside school, in their family and community life. That is where early intervention comes into play. If we can build the wrap-around service that those young people and their families need so that everybody has the same opportunities in life, we really need to do that. It is not an option to let young people from a disadvantaged background or those who underachieve fall into a black hole somewhere. We need to help them and to target and focus that help.

I welcome the commitment to develop the social enterprise sector and the creative industries. I particularly welcome the commitment to develop the framework for asset transfer to communities. That community asset transfer will help people in the social economy sector, in particular, as land, buildings or whatever that are no longer of use to the Executive or Departments can be handed over for community use. I would like to see that developed and rolled out.

There should be new ways of accessing finance, and, again, we have come up against that before. We have debated in the Chamber for several years the issue of giving credit unions extra powers, and it has also gone to Westminster. If that was developed, it would provide a way for credit unions to help social economy enterprises or small and medium-sized businesses to access finance. I would like to see the credit unions become central in that debate and feature in the economic strategy.

I do not want to go on and on and repeat what other Members have said. I broadly welcome today's strategy. It offers a way forward to build the economy and to deliver the Executive's commitments. When we are building a strong economy, it is important to ensure that it is a balanced economy. We need to work in partnership with everyone. All the stakeholders, businesses and training organisations need to work alongside government. It is also important to ensure that, when building our economy, we tackle and challenge poverty, deprivation and need. There is too big a gap between the disadvantaged or those in poverty and need and those who are affluent and OK, and we need to tackle that. There has to be a more equal distribution of income. We, as an Executive, have a strong responsibility to ensure that everybody, no matter what social, economic, cultural or religious background they come from, has the same opportunity to access the life opportunities —

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

**Ms J McCann:** That opportunity should be given particularly to our children and our young people.

**Mrs Cochrane:** I, too, gladly welcome the motion before the House. The document itself has arguably been a considerable time in the making, but I give due recognition to the labours and compromises of the Executive and the departmental staff involved in its design for agreeing to the proposed strategy and thus enabling this legislature to progress in a structured and guided manner during this mandate.

There is much to welcome in the document, including strong commitments to research and development, improving our economic skills base, encouraging export-driven companies and

the proposed overlap with the Programme for Government. By and large, we support the direction and targets contained in the strategy.

As I have said with reference to other government initiatives, directives are too often progressed in departmental silos, when best practice would indicate that a cohesive, joined-up approach could be employed to much greater effect. We believe that the best approach to reinvigorating the local economy is by encouraging a collaborative effort, and so we welcome the general approach in the strategy, with the hope that it will encourage a significantly improved collaborative framework to guide the main economic drivers.

There is much of merit in the strategy, but the one slight concern I have is evident very early on: the lack of consideration given to a shared future. Many parties do well to pay lip service to that, as and when the situation requires it or when headline opportunities present themselves. However, the language employed from the outset of the strategy is notably lacking. For example, it commits to building

*“a safe, peaceful, fair and prosperous society”*

with the obvious omission of the word “shared”. Further to that, little credence is given to the ever-present elephant in the room — the cost of division. The term “division” is referenced only twice in the document, with no real attempt made to address the cost of division and the impact it has on our economy and economic development. The greatest distortions in our local expenditure relate to the costs of managing our divided society. That division manifests itself in the ways in which some businesses provide their goods and services, in obstructions to labour market mobility, in deterrents to inward investment, in restrictions on internal investment decisions and in the absence of a cultural environment that can attract and nurture creativity. There is, therefore, a clear relationship between a shared future and the onset of economic prosperity, and, while I appreciate that this economic strategy is intended to be a positive document that will encourage all sectors to work together, clear targets for breaking down divisions would not necessarily be seen as negative.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Does the Member share the surprise of many in the community that, in the last mandate, Sinn Féin and DUP members of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister voted against the publication of the report on the cost of division and wanted to suppress it?

**Mr Speaker:** The Member will have a minute added to her time.

**Mrs Cochrane:** I thank the Member for her intervention. I am not surprised at that. It is something that we would want to see taken forward.

Delving further into the document, I am encouraged by the inclusion of goals and milestones in relation to Northern Ireland’s tourism potential. More than £300 million has been invested in our tourism infrastructure in anticipation of this year, delivering architecture that is transforming our skyline and our prospects. Building on such a landmark year and encompassing events in 2012-13, we have the potential to challenge and change global perceptions of our society, to market Northern Ireland as a destination in which to live, work, invest and learn and to grow our economy. From a tourism perspective alone, we have the capacity to attract

an additional 833,000 visitors over the next 18 months, and, if we are to continue along such a proactive path, we could generate an extra £140 million of revenue and create an additional 3,570 jobs over the next three years.

### 12.30 pm

Although the goals and milestones listed in the economic strategy are welcome, there is an uneasy feeling that they may not go quite far enough and are too short-term in focus. The opportunities that will come from 2012-13 should be fully embraced. However, we cannot be so naive as to think that such mainstream and unifying events and celebrations will last for ever. There is a need to develop a full and comprehensive tourism strategy, laying out a long-term action plan along with specific economic targets. In addition, such a plan could include the protection of natural, built and archive cultural assets; the development of cultural tourism; and recognition of the important economic role played by Northern Ireland’s airports. Although the recent gains made in relation to the devolution of air passenger duty are to be welcomed, there are many other important factors that will have an impact on our success in attracting visitors. A comprehensive aviation strategy is essential if we are to credibly compete nationally and internationally, and any long-term growth in tourist potential largely depends on the success of our airports. I wish to highlight several areas of need to illustrate the point. There should be a genuine commitment to develop route access by connecting Belfast International Airport with key markets in Germany, Austria, Canada and the United States. Consideration should also be given to enabling travellers with onward connections in the US to clear customs in Northern Ireland, as is the case in Dublin. We boast a colourful, capable and captivating society in Northern Ireland, and we owe it to ourselves to be ambitious and not to rely solely on attracting tourists from other airports —

**Lord Morrow:** I thank the Member for giving way. I have listened diligently to what she has said, without necessarily agreeing with everything. However, I am interested to hear her views on the extension of the runway at Belfast City Airport. Would you see that as an important part of the infrastructure and a way to encourage further investment in Belfast and in Northern Ireland generally? Would you support such a venture?

**Mrs Cochrane:** I would focus more on developing routes at the international airport. I think that that is the most important thing at the moment.

I conclude by saying that, on the whole, the strategy should be welcomed, and the Alliance Party endorses it.

**Mr Speaker:** The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. Of course, the first item of business when the House returns will be Question Time.

*The debate stood suspended.*

*The sitting was suspended at 12.32 pm.*

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

2.00 pm

## Oral Answers to Questions

### Culture, Arts and Leisure

#### Sport: Adult Participation

1. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given that the target of halting the decline in adult participation in sport by 2011 has not been met, what new targets have been set for the next Programme for Government period. (AQO 1533/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. No specific targets for participation in sport and physical activity are expressed in the Programme for Government. However, addressing the decline in the rate of participation is identified as a key issue in my Department's strategy for sport, Sport Matters. The strategy contains specific targets aimed at stopping the decline in adult participation in sport and physical recreation by 2013 and delivering at least a three percentage point increase in the rate by 2019. Participation in sport, therefore, remains an important measure of success of the implementation of strategic sport objectives in the North. My Department will reflect participation in its corporate and business plans.

On a more positive note, a report published by my Department on its website this morning indicates that 97% of young people surveyed in 2010 as part of a young persons' behaviour and attitude survey said that they had participated in sports or physical activity in the seven days prior to the survey.

**Mrs Overend:** I thank the Minister for her answer. Given that the 'Bridging the Gap' report highlights the fact that, weekly, tens of thousands of people cannot take part in activity due to a lack of facilities, what action will the Minister take to improve that situation?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I have seen aspects of that report and many others. Not only was a lack of facilities expressed as an issue, but even getting access to facilities was seen as a problem. Economic decline was also seen as a barrier to involvement in sport and physical activity. Recently, I was in discussions with Belfast City Council, and I know that some local authorities are looking at improving outdoor facilities and bringing gyms outside, for example. We discussed how they — with the Department of Education and others — can increase physical activity and participation in sport. That will be ongoing. However, I hear what the Member says and share some of her concerns.

**Lord Morrow:** With regard to participative sports, does the Minister accept that angling is one of the most accountable and one in which there is most participation by individuals throughout Northern Ireland? Does she accept that any steps that she might take on salmon fishing will impact on that recreational activity? Will she assure the House that she will bear that in mind in any decision that she might make?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I thank the Member for his question. I accept that angling is one of the best forms of participation in sport and physical activity and, indeed, of just taking time out. The Member was in the Chamber yesterday and at the debate on 21 October 2011 when he heard the proposals on catch and release for salmon fishing. I am sure that, yesterday, he heard the position with regard to netmen. I am mindful that anglers need access to waters; that angling clubs have been in discussion with the Department; and that the Department needs to assist, rather than curtail, any additional fishing on our waterways and rivers.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. In the absence of a PFG target, what action has the Minister put in place to ensure full participation in sport among those with disabilities and those from socially deprived areas?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Programme for Government looks at sporting facilities, particularly stadia. However, Sport Matters, which is a 10-year strategy, already targets people from socially deprived backgrounds and, particularly, people with disabilities. As part of the implementation of that strategy, a Sport Matters action plan has been produced and published. In October 2011, that plan was approved by DCAL's Sport Matters monitoring group, which I chair. With regard to some of the points that the Member raised, actions include Sport NI's continuing promotion of increased participation, investments such as the active communities programme, the Awards for Sport programme, the Countryside Access and Activities Network, Disability Sports NI and Special Olympics Ulster. If there is anything else that the Member thinks the Department could do to increase participation, particularly for people from excluded backgrounds and socially deprived areas or who have disabilities, I would welcome those suggestions.

#### Atlantic Salmon

2. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she can confirm that all methods will be used and all efforts made to ensure the survival of the Atlantic salmon. (AQO 1534/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** DCAL will endeavour to do all in its power to contribute to the conservation of the wild Atlantic salmon. We have developed a salmon management strategy for the DCAL jurisdiction in line with the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization's principles. The Department undertakes programmes of work to restore and enhance in-river habitats and implements and enforces the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966 and its associated regulations.

I will be going to public consultation on options for wild Atlantic salmon conservation in the near future. The outcomes of that consultation will inform policy development and potential legislative changes. It is also incumbent on all Departments and agencies to play their part during that consultation.

**Mr Flanagan:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. Given the importance of the Atlantic salmon to our ecology and history and to angling and tourism in areas such as mine in Fermanagh, what additional conservation measures can DCAL put in place?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** There are additional conservation measures that the Department can consider for commercial salmon fishing and recreational angling for salmon. The Member will be aware that the requirement for and scale of additional conservation measures are informed by robust scientific evidence and stakeholder consultation. The Department can also introduce further temporary measures. For example, it could limit the times that salmon may be caught by shortening the fishing season; it could restrict the number of salmon caught by introducing quotas; and it could place restrictions on the methods that are used to catch salmon, such as requiring the use of barbless hooks and increasing the size of net meshes. I know the Member is greatly interested in recreational angling. The compulsory catch-and-release period for that could be extended, or it could be made mandatory at all times. The Department could consider banning any or all forms of salmon exploitation within its jurisdiction.

As I announced yesterday, we will be going out to consultation on this issue. I look forward to hearing the views of Mr Flanagan and other Members.

**Mr Kinahan:** I am a little concerned and muddled about where we are with salmon. The Minister said that she would adopt a can-do approach, but I wonder where we are with licences and netting on Lough Neagh, on both the legal and illegal sides. Will the Minister clarify that?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am not sure whether the Member was aware of the announcement yesterday. If he was not here, he should —

**Mr Kinahan:** I am asking about Lough Neagh.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Yes. He should familiarise himself with that statement. We are looking at salmon conservation in DCAL waters and in the DCAL jurisdiction. The Loughs Agency and the different Departments have supported the initiatives that DCAL is taking.

I will get back to the Member in writing, but I can assure him that the Department is doing everything that it can to prevent illegal fishing. It is also providing care and support to those who police our waterways. There has been an issue of late, and we need to assure those people that we are doing everything that we can to protect them in the pursuit of their jobs and duties.

**Mr Byrne:** I thank the Minister for dealing with the issue of salmon. Can the Minister provide any recent statistics — if possible, for the past three years — on the amount of Atlantic salmon in our waterways?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I thank the Member for his question. I can provide those statistics, but I do not have them with me. I am happy to furnish the Member with them in writing.

### Film: 'The Shore'

3. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to recognise the achievement of the short film 'The Shore' at the Oscar awards. (AQO 1535/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am very proud that a film that was funded by Northern Ireland Screen, filmed in the North of Ireland and written, produced and directed by someone from this country has achieved such an accolade. I sent my

congratulations to Terry George and his daughter Oorlagh on hearing of their remarkable achievement. I also met them on their return to Belfast and again at Parliament Buildings to convey my appreciation of their work and the positive contribution that it has made to our film industry. I am also aware that the First Minister and deputy First Minister hosted a reception on Thursday 8 March for Terry and Oorlagh to pay tribute to their Oscar success. I fully supported that well-deserved recognition, as, I am sure, did Conall McDevitt and other Members.

**Mr McDevitt:** I join the Minister in sending my congratulations and those of my party to those who have brought such great success to our shores. Given that we spend only a fraction per capita on the promotion of film of that which would be spent in any other jurisdiction in these islands, what specific targets can the Minister point to in the Programme for Government and how much extra money has she secured in the forthcoming Budget to ensure that the success of 'The Shore' can be built on in future years?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I anticipate a report from NI Screen that will lead to a continuation of its robust and aggressive marketing to the global screen industry, and I am confident that our growing reputation for film and television production in the North will increase. We have secured a range of television productions that have been very successful, and I am waiting for the result of Northern Ireland Screen's negotiations to secure a number of additional significant productions in the new year. I will be happy to bring that information forward.

**Mrs Hale:** The Minister has partly answered my question, but will she assure the House that her Department will do all that it can to support the critical and commercial success of films made in Northern Ireland and help promote Northern Ireland as a place to invest in and visit?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Yes, absolutely. The Department and the Executive are keen to capitalise on the success of the Georges at the Oscars, previous successes such as 'Game of Thrones', other television and film productions and the ongoing interest in the creative industries and to make sure that we take advantage of the Oscar success and bring other productions to our shores.

**Ms Ruane:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sí dúinn. The Minister covered some of the specifics of building on the Oscar success of 'The Shore', which was filmed in a beautiful part of Ireland. Will she outline some of the specifics of her plans to build on that success?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** As I said, we are waiting for the results of NI Screen's negotiations for television and film production here. We are also looking at other possibilities through the creative industries, and we are having discussions with counterparts from the Irish Government. I also plan to talk to colleagues from England, Scotland and Wales about support for film and television production.

### Community Relations: Sport Matters

4. **Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department's Sport Matters strategy will contribute to the wider government agenda in the area of community relations. (AQO 1536/11-15)



**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Sport Matters strategy recognises that well-organised sport can make a significant contribution to community relations. It commits government to promoting community cohesion through sport in the context of a shared and better future, and it contains a number of actions to help achieve that. These include actions to encourage under-represented groups to participate in sport and the provision of shared spaces for sport that promote community integration. These Sport Matters actions support many of the themes in the emerging Programme for Government. The strategy is a building block under priority 4 of the Programme for Government in the areas of building safer and stronger shared communities. Sport Matters also supports the delivery of other PFG priorities, including, in priority 1, growing a sustainable economy and, in priority 2, tackling disadvantage.

**Mr S Anderson:** Sport as a means of improving community relations is part of the wider government agenda and is part of the Minister's oversight of her Department. Does the naming of GAA grounds after people who have been convicted in the criminal courts make a positive or a negative contribution to community relations?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I think that the Member's question has absolutely no bearing on the work that the Department is doing, and I would —

**Mr Wells:** You are scared to answer.

**Mr Allister:** She does not want to face it.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Well, I am aware of only one GAA ground, named after Kevin Lynch.

**2.15 pm**

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. Members know that they have to make their remarks through the Chair. There is no other way that we can do it.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Tá mé déanta. I am finished.

**Mr Brady:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What specific examples can the Minister give of interventions that promote community integration?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** In the development and promotion of better community integration, sport has made a positive contribution to creating a shared and equal future in the North of Ireland. The GAA's Belfast Cuchulainns hurling team comprises under-16s from Corpus Christi College, St Patrick's College, Bearnageeha, Belfast Boys' Model School and Ashfield Boys' High School. Many Members will also be aware of the IFA's World United intercultural football project, which is based in Belfast and is designed to increase participation in organised football by players and coaches among refugees, asylum seekers and members of the settled minority communities. The introduction of rugby into schools that are traditionally known for playing Gaelic games and, indeed, the work of the Ulster Council on outreach and engagement has helped to promote good and positive relationships.

**Mr Swann:** Will the Minister support the development of a greater number of shared facilities using artificial surfaces, thereby increasing the overall use of such facilities?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Yes. I recently visited Cookstown in mid-Ulster and saw the excellent sporting facilities there. Some of the artificial surfaces have encouraged and provided greater access for small and bigger clubs and individuals. As I said, I have also spoken to Belfast City Council and am speaking to other local authorities that have responsibility for providing pitches. Indeed, some have used Sport NI money for the provision of 3G pitches across the North, and it is good that there is more usage. More groups and individuals get access, and there is greater participation in sport.

**Mr Eastwood:** I note that the Minister mentioned the Boys' Model School in Belfast. I am sure that she will join me in congratulating St Joseph's Boys' School from Creggan, which beat the Boys' Model School in the Northern Ireland Schools' Cup semi-final last week. Aside from that, how much has her Department invested in the Unite Against Hate campaign, and will that investment continue?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** On the Member's second point, I am not sure. I will get him the figures, but the Department should definitely support that campaign, if it is not doing so already.

I congratulate St Joseph's and the Boys' Model. I am not being mealy-mouthed, but it is good that school competitions in particular are raised in a positive way on the Floor of the House, unlike the contributions of Members who have commented previously. Work on sport goes on in the House without recognition and proper respect.

## Tourism: Coleraine

**5. Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans she has to promote Coleraine as a historical and cultural destination in 2013 as it celebrates the 400th anniversary of the signing of its charter. (AQO 1537/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** My Department, through the Ulster-Scots Agency, will be developing a series of activities to mark a significant number of plantation anniversaries in 2013, including the 400th anniversary of the town charter of Coleraine. The Public Record Office has yet to finalise plans for 2013, but it holds a number of records relating to Coleraine in the 17th century, which are available for consultation at its headquarters.

**Mr Campbell:** Hopefully, the Minister will ensure that her Department, her officials and her ministerial position will get behind all the events enthusiastically. Will she ensure that, when she looks at promoting the 400th anniversary of Coleraine, it will be incorporated into the wider context of Northern Ireland, particularly when we look at the first inhabited piece of land on this entire island, incorporating Northern Ireland and the Republic, which is, of course, in Mountsandel in Coleraine?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** You learn something new every day. Any celebration or the marking of significant events, regardless of whom they are done by or where they happen, will receive my full support and that of my Department. Indeed, as the Member knows full well, the Public Record Office is a member of the DCAL family. If there are PRONI records that could be used in Coleraine to help the town to celebrate that anniversary, I will be happy to facilitate that. Indeed, the suite of commemorations and significant events that

the Executive will bring forward will be done on a broad base and in a respectful manner.

**Mr McClarty:** Any good history book on Ireland will always mention Coleraine first because of what Mr Campbell said. However, given Coleraine's hugely significant contribution to British and Irish history, would the Minister support a call to restore the old county name of County Coleraine?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am always happy when Members from the unionist community want to go for a thirty-third county in Ireland; it is quite appropriate. I appreciate the Member's interest in history and what he has outlined about the history and value of Coleraine in marking significant centenaries, but I cannot comment on going back to any names. However, I assure the Member from East Derry, from Coleraine, and others from that constituency that, given the facilities that DCAL has, including libraries, museums and public records, if suggestions are brought forward that are in keeping with the respectful and broad-based approach that we are taking to the commemoration of significant events, we are really keen to hear them and will try to give them support.

**Mr Lynch:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. What role do museums, libraries and archives have in marking commemorations?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** As I mentioned, there is a broad range of facilities in the DCAL family. For example, resources have been made available at PRONI, in our museums and in our libraries that provide all of us with a rich pool of knowledge that can inform an understanding of historical events and their significance to us today. The covenant is held by PRONI, with an online database resource on all those who signed. The former home of Mr George Shanks of Bedford Street is where DCAL is now. A copy of the proclamation is held by the Ulster Museum along with the pen that Edward Carson used to sign the covenant. Exhibits and programmes provided by museums, libraries, PRONI and, indeed, the arts help us to tell a story behind those historical facts.

**Mr Allister:** Does the Minister also look forward to celebrating the fact that, on 29 March 1613, King James I granted a charter to the nearby settlement that contained these immutable words:

*"that the said city or town of Derry, for ever hereafter be and shall be named and called the city of Londonderry"?*

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am not getting into answering questions about specific place names. I know Derry city as Derry city in the county of Derry. The articles, including the King James Bible, are also in my Department, and, if the Member is interested, I would be happy to escort him to show him the King James Bible, and we both can look at that quote. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order, please.

### Rathfriland Health Centre, Library and Leisure Complex

6. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action her Department has taken to facilitate the proposed health centre, library and leisure complex in Rathfriland. (AQO 1538/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** All providers of public services have a duty to work in partnership with each other and to join up services wherever possible. It is quite clear that the public expect government to work in a more joined-up and seamless way. The accommodation of individual libraries is an operational matter for the board of Libraries NI, which is always looking for opportunities to work in partnership with other service providers to improve access to library services. I understand from Libraries NI that the development of the project is at a very early stage. Although some very initial discussions have taken place, Libraries NI is not aware of any formal proposal on the project at this time, and, therefore, that is not a capital priority for Libraries NI.

**Mr Wells:** I noticed that the Minister deliberately avoided the very pointed question from my colleague Mr Anderson about the Kevin Lynch GAA club. I hope that she will not, therefore, avoid my supplementary question in the same way.

It is absolutely imperative that her Department gets in behind this project with enthusiasm. Unless Libraries Northern Ireland —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr Wells, can we have a question please?

**Mr Wells:** — and the other authorities get together, the project will not proceed.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** There was no question there, but I assume that the Member was asking whether I am going to ask Libraries NI to make sure that the library that he has mentioned is on its capital programme. Libraries NI gives me advice. If this is not on its capital programme as a priority but it is looking at some medium-term work, I am happy to see what that medium term is. If the Member was asking whether I should insist or whether we should all collectively try to provide a better suite of public facilities and a more joined-up approach, I am happy to do that, but there is nothing specific on the library.

**Mr McCallister:** With regard to Rathfriland specifically, Banbridge District Council has a keen interest in progressing that one single place with health service provision in there as well. Will the Minister instruct Libraries NI to get in contact with the council and make sure that this gets progressed further and off the ground?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I thank the Member — possibly the new leader of the opposition, if the media are to be believed — for his question. I will talk to Libraries NI about the question you have raised, because I think that beneath it is a concern that public services are not joining up together to provide a better suite, better access and a more cohesive approach to make sure that people get the best out of their public investment. I am happy to forward the comments, with a recommendation that Libraries NI should have discussions with libraries in County Down.

### Boxing: Strategic Implementation Plan

7. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what is the timescale for the completion and publication of the strategic implementation plan for boxing. (AQO 1539/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I welcome the Member's question on the strategy for boxing going forward. I have previously stressed in the House the importance of boxing as a sport and, in

particular, the benefits and opportunities it offers to young people, especially in areas of high social need. It is for that reason that I have agreed that Sport NI should assist the Ulster Provincial Boxing Council in the development of a strategic implementation plan for the sport, which will give effect to the Irish Amateur Boxing Association's five-year strategy for boxing across Ireland.

**Miss M McIlveen:** In order to ensure that boxing in Northern Ireland is as open and inclusive as possible, has consideration been given to an initiative along the lines of the IFA's Football for All?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** In fairness to the boxing fraternity, it has been one of the sports that have done a very good job behind the scenes in crossing communities and providing a better direction in terms of cohesiveness. People involved in boxing, like many other sports, need to acknowledge the fact that reaching out and engaging with other members of the community has to be encouraged, and they have to demonstrate how they do that. Part of the strategy and of any additional investment in boxing will have to include how they do that and what lessons we can learn from other sports. The IFA and the GAA are two of the best examples of how to go forward — as is rugby — that we could offer boxing or any other sport.

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus a Aire. I would be interested to know about the Minister's sporting initiative in regard to boxing. Boxing is usually the second cousin of other sports here when it comes to support. What benefits does she think her initiative will give to boxing?

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Boxing may not have received the support that it should have, but it will on my watch. I share that enthusiasm and interest with many Members in the House. I will make sure that it is brought up to a level that it deserves. Part of the investment in boxing and the business case will look to see where the gaps have been, what we can do as an interim step and what we need to do for the future.

## Education

### Schools: Viability Audit

1. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Education when he will publish the details of the viability audit. (AQO 1548/11-15)

5. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the viability audit. (AQO 1552/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education):** Go raibh maith agat as an cheist sin. With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 5 together.

The viability audits were published on Tuesday 6 March by each of the education and library boards on their websites. Overall, the findings of the audits showed that a range of schools, both primary and post-primary, are evidencing stress at this time.

I will seek assurances from the managing authorities of the schools that evidence the greatest degree of stress in educational attainment that steps are being taken to protect the educational well-being of pupils. The viability audit data

will be combined with a wide range of other educational, demographic and economic data to provide detailed area profiles that will provide the information base for the area planning process.

### 2.30 pm

The overall picture is a serious one. It confirms the need to move quickly on the area plans to put in place a network of viable and sustainable schools that will deliver high-quality education for all pupils.

**Mr McGlone:** Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for that response. Given that the viability audits were conducted against only three of the sustainable schools criteria — many in the House would see them as a thinly veiled threat to our schools — does the Minister accept that he has, effectively, put a closure sign on many of our schools, particularly those in our rural areas?

**Mr O'Dowd:** The threat in the debate is not to schools; it is to young people's education. That is where all Members should concentrate their minds. The viability audit used three of the sustainable schools criteria. No action will be taken against any school based on those three criteria alone. Action will be taken only after closer examination of the sustainable schools policy, which has six criteria, by and large, against which a school is measured.

No one in the House should choose to ignore the findings of the viability audit. It is clear that a number of schools are evidencing educational under-attainment levels, about which everybody should be concerned. Action needs to be taken in those schools. After the full process has been gone through, including the development proposal, which includes a two-month consultation process, if the right thing to do to protect the educational attainment of young people is to close the school, that action will be carried out.

**Mr Beggs:** I thank the Minister for his response. Does he acknowledge that little new material has come out of the viability audit and that it continues to list a high number of schools — I think that it is 84% of post-primary schools and 47% of primary schools — as stressed, which causes unnecessary stress to communities, school staff, parents and pupils?

**Mr O'Dowd:** You are correct: a significant amount of the information that is before us is not new. However, it has been collated at a central point and it is now open to public examination. Is the Member seriously suggesting that the general public are of such a nervous disposition that they cannot handle the information? If we live in an open and democratic society and our politics and government are to be open, democratic and accountable, it is only right and proper that information, unpalatable as it may be at times, should be in the public domain. Parents and pupils have a right to know the information about their local school. The information will help to inform the debate about the future of education. Going in to the future, we require an informed debate about education.

**Mr Storey:** Does the Minister not agree that he has created a very difficult situation, given that he and his Department did not use criteria that were comparable? For non-selective schools, he used a benchmark of 25%, which is lower than the Northern Ireland average, based on five GCSEs at grades A\* to C; and he used a benchmark for the grammar

schools of 85%, which was above the Northern Ireland average, based on seven GCSEs. The data for educational attainment was from 2008-09 and 2009-2010, so it is out of date and is not information that can be used in a way that is fair and comparable.

**Mr O'Dowd:** The data for 2010-11 has not yet been verified. If I were to use the 2010-11 data — the boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) collated the information — I would be accused of using data that had not been verified. The figures were gathered in agreement with the boards and the CCMS. The grammars are on a higher level than secondary schools because grammars tell us that their academic ability outstrips all other sectors, so why should they not be measured against a higher plane? Seven GCSEs for a grammar school pupil is perhaps a medium measure; perhaps it should be higher. Grammar schools practise academic selection because they tell us that they want to bring the brightest pupils in to their schools and they offer higher quality education than any other system. Therefore, they should be measured against a higher benchmark than any other sector.

**Ms Boyle:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What analysis has the Minister's Department done on the disparity between controlled and maintained schools, and is he concerned by the trends seen in the audit?

**Mr O'Dowd:** The audit highlighted that educational attainment in the maintained sector is marginally higher. However, no sector can be overly proud of the progress thus far. There are serious concerns in the controlled sector — highlighted in Dawn Purvis's and other reports — about educational attainment, particularly of working class Protestant boys. I believe that the suite of policies that we have in place is a significant challenge to that trend continuing and that we can significantly change it. Within the Catholic sector as well, however, a significant number of young people still leave education without proper qualifications or value added to their lives.

## Schools: Computer Science

2. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Education whether his Department will introduce a separate computer science GCSE subject to address the skills shortage in this sector. (AQO 1549/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** I noted with interest the Secretary of State's decision in England to disapply the national curriculum programmes of study and the associated attainment targets and assessment arrangements for ICT from September 2012. Should that decision lead to changes in ICT-related qualifications, including GCSEs, I will, of course, want to consider the implications for pupils in the North. Indeed, I have asked the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) to consider the developments in England and provide formal advice on whether similar GCSE and GCE specifications should be developed for use here.

My Department is also a member of the ICT working group that was established by the Department for Employment and Learning in response to the ICT sector's concerns about skills shortages and mismatches here. Computer science is a specialised field, and the flexibility already in place within the revised curriculum enables schools to teach the subject at any key stage, if they feel it appropriate. At Key Stage 4,

GCSE, some awarding bodies offer computing in addition to ICT. The revised curriculum has been designed to provide flexibility for schools to develop experiences that suit the needs of their pupils. The revised curriculum embeds mandatory cross-curricular skills and keeps prescribed content to a minimum, allowing schools to choose the most appropriate approach to take to ensure that pupils are engaged and challenged to reach their full potential.

**Mrs Cochrane:** I thank the Minister for his answer and for the progress that is being made. Given that the school viability audits use the percentage of pupils attaining grades A to C at GCSE as an indicator of a quality educational experience, and that it is generally recognised that ICT would give a better chance of pupils achieving a higher grade than other subjects such as computer science, does the Minister agree that schools are unlikely to choose to offer the more challenging option, unless they are actively encouraged to do so?

**Mr O'Dowd:** No, I do not think that is the case. The measure across the five GCSEs is a basic measure of skills. Many young people display a great interest in ICT. We have to focus now on whether the coursework and provision are adequate and meet the sector's needs. I, too, have been approached by pupils and teachers — you have been in regular correspondence with me, as has the sector — to say that the skills base that is laid down at schools may not meet the needs of the ICT sector. The establishment of a task force by the Minister for Employment and Learning is a valuable step forward. I and my Department are happy to engage fully with that working group. I am happy to work on and move along any of its findings, which will be evidence and research based, to ensure that we have the skills base required to build the ICT sector.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. It is important that the education system has the responsibility to provide the skills base for the economy, moving forward, which was debated by Members earlier today. As it beds in over the next number of years, how will the entitlement framework help schools develop a curricular offering that is relevant to a modern economy?

**Mr O'Dowd:** The core principle of the entitlement framework, and the counterbalance to the revised curriculum at Key Stage 4, is to guarantee equality of access for all pupils, from Key Stage 4 to a broad and balanced, more economically relevant curriculum with clear progression pathways.

I also want to ensure that, at schools level and in my Department, we build up a working relationship with industry and business; that we have a close working relationship with DEL as regards that matter; and that we constantly review and reassure ourselves that the curriculum and the courses delivered by our schools and further and higher education are relevant to the economy now and in the future. The revised curriculum gives us a basis to do that, but we must also constantly challenge ourselves to ensure that it is relevant to a modern economy.

**Mrs Overend:** I appreciate the Minister's responses so far. Does the Minister appreciate that computer science, as opposed to ICT, is a vital subject that needs to be taught at GCSE level so that pupils may progress to further education and A levels in order to provide those skills for the workforce? Will he assure us that he will work on that sooner rather than later?

**Mr O'Dowd:** As I said in response to previous questions from Members, we are involved with the Department for Employment and Learning's working group as regards that matter. I recognise that computer science is distinct from ICT. Indeed, when I talk to the ICT sector and to the industry, they emphasise that point time and again. We need young people who can build a computer from the computer chip right through to all its working mechanisms, not simply work the software programmes in the computer. We want a generation of young people who are not only building new computers and ideas in computer science but moving beyond where we are now. So, yes, I recognise that wholeheartedly.

I have a keen interest in the matter because it has been raised with me, as I said, by parents, pupils, teachers and the sector. I think that we can get it right, and the Employment and Learning Minister's programme of work will allow us to do that. However, let us move forward on the evidence base that will come out of the working group. As I said, I am happy to move forward with any proposals coming from that group that are based on evidence and research.

### Education: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Report

3. **Mr W Clarke** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report, which confirms that successful education systems worldwide prioritise teaching and leadership standards and do not employ academic selection. (AQO 1550/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am not surprised by the findings of the latest OECD report. Inspection and research evidence shows that good school leadership is central to school improvement. Research also shows that improving the quality of teaching has a positive impact on all pupils. However, pupils who are underachieving or who are from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit most.

The school improvement policy, which I continue to take forward, sets out the characteristics of a successful school. They include high-quality teaching and learning, effective leadership, child-centred provision and a school connected to its community. The latest OECD report also states that selection widens achievement gaps and inequalities. Pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds are the pupils most adversely affected by selection. That mirrors the findings of previous OECD reports, which found that selection does not raise standards overall but increases the difference in performance between schools.

I want all our young people to achieve to their full potential. Therefore, I want to drive out the inequalities that exist in our education system. That is why I am opposed to academic selection and why I continue to work to bring it to an end.

**Mr W Clarke:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. How do education systems that operate academic selection and do not prioritise teachers, teaching and leadership damage economic standing?

**Mr O'Dowd:** This is not the only reason, but it is one of the reasons highlighted in our recent audit. One of the findings shows that around 40% of our young people are leaving school without the proper qualifications. Young people

leaving school without the proper qualifications are less likely to gain employment, more likely to suffer from health and social problems and more likely to end up in the justice system. That alone has a detrimental economic effect, not only on the individual but on broader society.

Academic selection has been highlighted again in the OECD report. The OECD is made up of 30 countries, including the UK and Ireland. It is a highly respected body that has influenced government policy across Europe with regard to educational plans. Thus far, unfortunately, parties in this House have refused to recognise the benefits of ending selection. I believe that a sensible debate on academic selection needs to take place. We need to challenge each other on it and ensure that our education system benefits all the young people involved, not just some of them.

If we had a world-class education system, we would have a world-class economy. I do not believe that we have a world-class education system. We could have one, and we certainly do not have a world-class economy. If we secure a world-class education system, however, we will go a long way towards securing a world-class economy.

### 2.45 pm

**Mr Elliott:** Given that it is obvious that the Minister does not have any power to remove the academic selection that is in place, would it not be better that he put a practical, regulated system in place until there is an alternative way forward, without the unregulated tests that are currently there?

**Mr O'Dowd:** There may be merit in that argument if this debate had not been going on for five decades. Those within the grammar sector have been telling everyone else for five decades that if they were given a wee bit more time, they would move from the position they are in. In fact, they have entrenched their position without any challenge to them.

The Member is right: on my own, I cannot change the position on academic selection. However, we should have a mature, sensible debate about the way forward around academic selection, how we ensure that we retain a system that has academic and educational excellence, and how we benefit all the young people in our education system. If we have that debate, I believe that, collectively, we can move beyond academic selection.

You may say to this or any Minister, "Oh, you don't have the power to do something; we have got you in a corner." You may have got me in a corner but all the young people who are losing out because of academic selection are also stuck in that corner. I do not mind whether you keep me in the corner as long as you let the young people out of the corner. I will then be happy enough.

**Mr McDevitt:** I welcome the Minister's challenge to us all to enter into this debate in an informed way. Will he confirm that the OECD does not say that academic selection is always socially regressive but does say that the type of academic selection that we have in this region is very socially regressive? Therefore, would it not be in the best interests of this region, our pupils and this Assembly to start a debate about a new system of education that understands that it is possible — the OECD would reinforce this — to select kids at, for example, age 14 and still have a world-class —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question, please.

**Mr McDevitt:** — socially equitable education system?

**Mr O'Dowd:** I will quote from the OECD report and maybe quote from the SDLP's election manifesto. The SDLP is opposed to academic selection as well. I know it is silent on that and likes to keep it in the background but it is opposed to it.

I will quote from the most recent report, which makes five recommendations that help to prevent failure and promote completion of upper secondary education. Those recommendations include avoiding early tracking:

*"Early student selection has a negative impact on students assigned to lower tracks and exacerbates inequities, without raising average performance. Early student selection should be deferred to upper secondary education while reinforcing comprehensive schooling."*

### Further Education: Key Stages 4 and 5

4. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Education what discussions there have been between his Department and further education colleges in relation to the curriculum at Key Stages 4 and 5. (AQO 1551/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** The delivery of the curriculum at any key stage is a matter for individual schools to ensure that the statutory requirements are met. At Key Stage 4 and post-16, schools must deliver access to a range of broad, balanced and economically relevant courses that have clear progression pathways and meet the needs of pupils. Post-primary schools can work together on a local basis in area learning communities. Working together allows them to plan their curricular offer, maximise resources and minimise duplication of provision.

I am pleased to note that further education colleges are members of, and play an important part in, those area learning communities. They can offer high-quality specialist and technical facilities and industry expertise, which can complement schools' own provision. I welcome the engagement and good partnership working between post-primary schools and acknowledge the valuable role that further education colleges can play in the delivery of the Key Stage 4 and the post-16 curriculum.

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Go raibh maith agat, a Aire. Further education colleges have an educational and economic role. A number of them are looking at different developments with regard to industries, including some of the renewable industries. How is the curriculum kept up to date with new economic drivers?

**Mr O'Dowd:** As I said in response to a previous Member's question, the curriculum is flexible enough to allow schools to adapt to the changing economic circumstances. It is a good sign of co-operation between the sectors that area learning communities are involving themselves with further education colleges in a productive and collaborative way.

Many further education colleges are in modern new buildings and offer excellent facilities for young people. I think that it is only right and proper that those facilities can be, and are, used rather than our duplicating those services within the schools estate. I think that the work that is going

on in the area learning communities between schools and further education colleges continues to be of benefit to our young people.

**Mr Copeland:** Thank you so far, Minister. Will you update the House on the recommendations of the Costello report on the minimum number of courses, which I understand are set at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 at 24 and 27 respectively?

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Member may be aware that as a result of my September statement, in which I set out the future of education, I said that the entitlement framework would become law. The order was signed off in December. As we move towards 2013, I have introduced a staged process for completion by 2015. I did so because I recognised the budgetary pressures that are bearing down on our schools. I wanted to give them further time to plan for the full entitlement framework. The entitlement framework is now law and will be implemented in full by 2014-15.

**Mr D Bradley:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí a thug sé go dtí seo. Ba mhaith liom an méid seo a fhiafraí de. I thank the Minister for his answer. Given that further education has a role in building the new economy, what is the Minister's view on the possibility of locating further education within a new Department of the economy?

**Mr O'Dowd:** If that new Department of the economy is the Department of Education, I am all for it. I believe that responsibility for the natural progression of education from preschool through to university and further and higher education should be within one Department; the Department of Education. However, a number of proposals have come forward, all of which are workable in their own way: all have their own positive and negative attributes. I have made my pitch known, and I will be happy to work with whatever proposals come forward following OFMDFM's deliberations on the matter.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question 5 has been dealt with.

### Special Education

6. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Education what he is doing to ensure that special education schools receive adequate support and funding. (AQO 1553/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am aware of the value and importance of the support provided by special schools to some of our most vulnerable children with special educational needs (SEN) and their families. They play a vital role within the SEN framework, and this is underpinned by legislation. In recognition of this, when setting Budget 2011-15 allocations, I agreed that a number of front line services should be afforded protection. This includes funding for special educational needs. As a result, no reductions in funding allocations for special schools have been included in my Department's savings delivery plan.

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he give priority to special schools that are in substandard accommodation?

**Mr O'Dowd:** Go raibh maith agat as an cheist sin. One of the pleasures of my job is to visit schools and meet educators and pupils. I have to say that I have visited a number of special educational needs schools in which

the staff, on a daily basis, go above and beyond the call of duty and provide an excellent service to our young people. However, they are being let down by the facilities in which they are operating. Some of the situations are heartbreaking, when you see the facilities in which some of our most vulnerable young people are being catered for. I have asked the education boards to come back to me with area plans for special educational needs schools by the end of this month.

I have a limited capital budget going into next year. I have said that we live in difficult times but not impossible times. I want to be able to announce a building programme for the 2012-13 financial year. I would like to include in that programmes of work for special educational needs. I am not yet in a position to confirm how many we will be able to go ahead with, but I want to do that. I am also aware that there are many schools in our schools estate that require refurbishment, repair and, indeed, rebuild.

In short, what I am saying is that in the 2012-13 financial year, I want to reopen the building programme for new schools. I may have to make an announcement ahead of the conclusion of area planning, because with public consultation and everything else, area planning may not be completed until October. I may have to make a statement on building core schools ahead of that. I would like a number of special educational needs schools improved under the building programme.

**Mr G Robinson:** Does the Minister agree that funding for special education can help to realise the full potential of children with a disability and enhance their quality of life?

**Mr O'Dowd:** Without doubt. That is one of the reasons why I excluded special educational needs from any savings delivery plan proposals. These are some of the most vulnerable young people in our society, and they deserve every chance that the state and government can give them. I want to secure funding for our special educational needs schools, and I want improvements to the estate of special educational needs. If there are further funds available as I review my budgets in the years ahead, I will also want further investment in special educational needs.

**Ms Lo:** I am not sure if the Minister is aware that, last month, six special schools in Belfast organised a very successful fashion show in Belfast City Hall, which was part funded by the extended-schools programme and supported by Belfast City Council and the business sector. Will the Minister assure the House that such wonderful initiatives that build the children's confidence will be fully supported by the Department?

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am aware of the event. I am renowned for my fashion sense but, unfortunately, I was not able to attend. Schools across our society use many initiatives to raise funds, to raise the profiles of the schools and also to raise the confidence levels of the young people who attend those schools. The event that you talk about is one of those initiatives. You mentioned extended schools. My budget has been under internal review. I hope to be in a position to announce the outcome of that review later this month. I will place particular focus on the extended-schools programme to see what added benefit we can bring to it.

## Educational Disadvantage

7. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is currently taking to tackle educational disadvantage in Protestant working-class areas. (AQO 1554/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am determined to take action to break the link between social disadvantage and educational underachievement for all pupils. The recent OECD publication on supporting disadvantaged students and schools reported that the highest-performing education systems across OECD countries combine quality with equality. In particular, the report found that academic selection exacerbates inequalities without raising average performance.

It is those pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who are most adversely affected by selection. Therefore, I continue to work towards the end of that practice. I also continue to implement 'Every School a Good School: A Policy for School Improvement', which stresses the central role of well-led schools with high expectations for all their pupils. It is supported by a range of policies aimed at raising standards, including the literacy and numeracy strategy, the revised curriculum, the entitlement framework, and work to finalise strategies on early years and special educational needs and inclusion.

At the same time, we are providing additional support for schools that serve some of our most disadvantaged communities, including programmes such as extended schools and full-service schools. I also want to stress the value of education to ensure that all young people, especially those in deprived communities, understand the importance of doing well at school.

## Executive Committee Business

### Economic Strategy

*Debate resumed on motion:*

*That this Assembly endorses the Northern Ireland economic strategy agreed by the Executive. — [Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment).]*

**Mr Moutray:** When devolution was established and the current arrangements were set up five years ago, many people were greatly encouraged. Many were even surprised that the Executive, in their first Programme for Government, agreed to make the economy their number one priority.

#### 3.00 pm

That was indeed a very challenging and important move. The regeneration of the economy was correctly recognised as the key to building a better future. The task was massive and daunting. Years of terrorism, underinvestment and economic decline had left our economy very weak and largely dependent on the public sector and on help from West . Our economic base had shrunk and withered.

Over the years of the Troubles, our overdependence on the public sector was perhaps understandable, but it was, and is, a foundation of sand. Northern Ireland was once famous for its skills, innovation and manufacturing, but the days of heavy engineering and manufacturing are largely gone. Ships, rope and linen are all but a distant memory.

Times have changed radically, but we are still people who are instinctively business orientated. I see it in my constituency, particularly in Craigavon, where we have Almac, Kingspan and Moy Park. Those are all committed, leading businesses employing vast numbers. We also have smaller family-run businesses that are key to economic growth and job creation. I also see it in our young people, with more and more becoming entrepreneurs. For example, we have SlurryKat in Waringstown and Green Energy Technology, which is a leading renewable energy systems company in the Craigavon area. Many young people are also embarking on business-orientated educational courses at university.

I feel that we have a great opportunity now to build on the progress that has been made in the first five years in Government. Those five years have not been easy. Just as we emerged from the Troubles, we were hit hard by the world recession and banking crisis. As we all know, that has shaken business confidence to the core and left us reeling. The global economy remains volatile and could be affected by any number of world developments. We are not yet out of the woods. However, I believe that the proposed economic investment strategy will give us very clear goals — many of them challenging — to work towards.

I warmly welcome the draft economic strategy document, which has been out for consultation and is before us for consideration today. It charts a very clear path for the next two decades. The paper builds on the good work undertaken by the independent review of economic policy, which was set up by my colleague Minister Arlene Foster. Several of IREP's key recommendations are being implemented, and they provide the context for much of what is recommended in the strategy paper.

The document before us does not offer a quick fix. That is good, as there is no quick fix that will stick. The strategy looks ahead to 2030, which is 18 years down the road. In setting out its vision for sustainable growth and prosperity, the document is realistic. It faces up to the fact that we are not completely in control of our local economy.

I have already referred to the world economy. The old saying “no man is an island” seems very apt. We are in a global village and are affected very quickly by a whole range of economic and financial developments and trends. As the strategy document points out, we need to rebalance the economy by reducing dependence on the public sector and the public purse and growing a strong, dynamic and vibrant 21st century private sector, which will generate wealth and bring prosperity for all.

I am glad that we are part of the UK economy. It has left us in a much stronger and better position than the Irish Republic, but, as a devolved region of the United Kingdom, our economic and fiscal levers are limited. I commend my Executive colleagues for their hard work in relation to negotiations with Her Majesty's Treasury on corporation tax-varying powers, but, as we all know, it will take more than that. That, in itself, is no silver bullet.

The draft strategy also makes clear and sets out a range of other levers. Inward investment is crucial, but even more crucial, I think, is the development of our SMEs. They are the backbone of our economy. They must be given every encouragement, and they need to take every opportunity. Let us ensure that we offer them all the support that we can. We must raise our game in relation to exports, as the strategy document makes clear that export-led growth is the focus of the economic strategy.

We must also improve in areas such as R&D, innovation, creativity and skills. Northern Ireland is building a head of steam in respect of the creative industry, and I commend Terry George on his recent Oscar win for the top short film.

I believe that strides are being made in incubating new business start-ups and supporting young people in start-ups. I know that many Members in this Chamber are concerned about the high rates of unemployment, especially among our young people. It goes without saying that we need a skilled and trained workforce, and we need to focus on the sorts of skills and training that will ensure good quality jobs.

I am glad to note that the strategy document regards the promotion of employment and the development of employment opportunities as a short- to medium-term theme. I stress the need for cross-cutting between Departments and all key agencies; that is absolutely crucial. Every Department has a role to play in helping to take the economic strategy forward. The Executive's subcommittee on the economy is a good example of the sort of joined-up approach that we need. We must continue to involve key players, such as the CBI, chambers of trade, district councils, trade unions, etc.

As we approach Northern Ireland's centenary, let us revive the entrepreneurial spirit of 100 years ago and adapt it to today's challenges and opportunities. We are not interested in doing all of this just to make some people very rich; we are doing it because we want to improve the quality of life of everyone across the community and at all levels in society.



We must try to build a better future for all of our people. I commend the economic strategy to the House.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cúpla focal a rá faoin straitéis. I would like to say a few words on the economic strategy. The Member who has just spoken talked about not relying on the public sector. From my point of view and that of my constituency, Armagh city and district is heavily reliant on the public sector.

I welcome the document and the points on page 49 about the promotion of jobs and the new business start-ups. The Minister is only too aware of the situation regarding the potential job losses in Armagh. So, I would like her to comment on that in relation to the promotion of jobs and inform us of what work she is doing with the local authorities, because they have drafted their own master plans. I would like the Minister to outline what work is going on within local authorities.

I also welcome the loan fund. From my experience with some of the companies that I have been working with recently, it seems that Invest NI has been working with the businesses. I certainly welcome that, and I would promote more of that in the North.

There is talk about the promotion of rural businesses. Rural businesses have a big part to play in the economy, and I like the intention expressed in the document relating to microregeneration and support for rural businesses.

I want to talk about tourism. Recently, we have seen announcements, even in the Programme for Government, about programmes for the north-west and the north-east. The promotion of the golf tournament in Portrush is welcome. It is great that this island has had four major champions over the past four years. It is good that Pádraig Harrington led the way and that, subsequently, three northerners followed suit in the past couple of years. That is most welcome. I want to mention to the Minister that Armagh city has a good par 70 parkland golf course, if she ever wants to promote golf in the Armagh city and district area.

I know rightly that Armagh city has a total reliance on tourism, and it is a good tourism product. It has the likes of Navan Fort and the two cathedrals. However, every time I see advertisements for tourism, it is the Giant's Causeway that is being shown. I would like the Minister to look at promoting tourism in the Armagh area; it would be most welcome. I hope that the Minister will look at that within the economic strategy.

While promoting tourism, we have to look at planning policy. I want to mention the angling side of tourism. There is a planning policy statement, PPS 16. Fermanagh and Armagh have a lot of lakes, and there is a keen interest in angling, but PPS 16 does not afford the opportunity for that aspect of tourism. I would like the Minister to comment on that and, perhaps, to work with the Environment Minister to look at the policies to see whether we can look at that tourism aspect.

I welcome the announcement of funding for broadband. There are businesses in my area that rely on broadband. Recently, one of the industrial estates had to turn down business because it could not get the required broadband speed. The business had to renege on the advances from customers. Although, Minister, you have done a lot of work to promote broadband and there is now satellite and the

new antennae system, a lot of people, especially in rural areas, are calling for fixed-line broadband. I would like the Minister to maybe touch on some of that. There is a responsibility on BT. I would like more talk with BT and more consideration to be given to the commitment to provide broadband. There are areas of the North that are remote and may not be able to facilitate fixed-line broadband, but I think that more can still be done. I would also like the Minister to talk to the local council areas about the Armagh/Monaghan digital corridor and to utilise that more.

There is mention in the document of planning and planning reform. It is key that we work together, across the Departments, to develop that. Planning is being transferred to the local authorities. The development plans that come out of that will lead to mainly economic drivers.

With that, let me say that I support the strategy.

**Mr McDevitt:** I am happy to have the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I would like to comment on just a couple of aspects of the strategy, which is, of course, a very welcome document and, undoubtedly, a step forward for us all in economic planning at a regional level. That said, when you look at the visual representation of our economy and the SWOT analysis behind the strategies conducted on the Northern Ireland economy, as illustrated on page 27, you will see all the stuff that we know. You will see all the issues around some of the weaknesses in our economy. However, there is, in my opinion, quite a lot missing. We identify as our second-last external threat rising or volatile energy costs, but nowhere in the analysis do we see energy as a key economic opportunity. That is interesting. When one looks at the economic planning of other very progressive regions or nations in the past decade, one sees that the cost of energy, security of energy supply and the promotion of energy independence at either a regional or national level tend to nearly dominate economic planning. Yet this strategy does not really go there. In fact, it is rather silent on that. It reduces energy to being a series of targets on renewables. It reduces the issue to energy costs. Given that we are practically entirely dependent on —

**Mr Moutray:** I thank the Member for giving way. Given what the Member says, will he then support the North/South interconnector for energy?

**Mr McDevitt:** That is a very interesting point. The document is also exceptionally silent on the practicalities of developing a sustainable energy infrastructure across the island of Ireland. It talks about need in general terms but does not talk about specifics. My opinion is that, when looking at a document like this, a strategic economic plan, everything needs to be on the table.

**Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):** Does the Member accept that one of the building blocks of the Programme for Government and, indeed, the economic strategy is the strategic energy framework? The framework sets out the 10-year plan for the Executive and Assembly in dealing with energy matters. The Programme for Government was published on the same day as the economic strategy. In my closing remarks, I will be making the point that those documents are to be read together and not in isolation.

**Mr McDevitt:** I am glad that I got a debate going, Mr Deputy Speaker. Yes, it is in the Programme for Government, but it

is not in the economic strategy. The point that I was making — *[Interruption.]*

The Minister shakes her head, but this is a very important point.

When you look at the most progressive economic planning around the world in the past decade, you see that it involves taking ownership of energy at an economic level. It sits inside the Minister's Department, albeit buried down the back of a corridor at the end of another corridor —

### 3.15 pm

**Mrs Foster:** It is in the strategic energy framework.

**Mr McDevitt:** — and the strategic energy framework, as the Minister says, which also sits inside her Department. I am entitled to my views around here, and I would like to see it as a much more central driver in economic planning and to be explicitly laid out there. When you look at the opportunity for us to develop a sustainable smart grid for electricity, and when you look at the opportunity for us to be more resilient in respect of natural resources and to be able to tap into the much greater renewable opportunity, you see that we will have to plan our economy around that.

I am not going to speak for too much longer. In a recent book in which he talks about the future of the American economy, Bill Clinton talks about the three Es: economy, energy and the environment. He basically says that any modern or progressive economy should be planning itself around a test applied against those three Es. Employment: are jobs energy efficient? In other words, do they produce things using less energy than jobs previously required to produce things? Is it a more sustainable type of manufacturing? Energy: is the type of energy we use more environmentally friendly than energy in the past decade? Is it employment creating? You can conceive of energy that is environmentally friendly — energy that does not use an awful lot of carbon in its production — but does not create any jobs. Nuclear energy, for example, is a type of energy that we would never entertain on this island.

If we are serious about tapping into energy as part of our economic plan, we have to see the opportunity in energy as an employment creator, and that is where renewable energy fits in with so much else of what is written in this document — all the stuff that I would like to really commend: the stuff about innovation and joining up the dots in respect of our other economic planning.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am going to sit down, because that was the only point that I really wanted to seriously make. I am very glad that the Minister intervened, and I appreciate her remarks. However, I stand by my remarks. I think that we should and could see a much greater focus on the energy opportunity, as well as the cost of higher energy, in the document.

**Mr Hamilton:** I congratulate the Minister and her Executive colleagues on producing the economic strategy for Northern Ireland. A lot of effort and hard work was put in by the Minister, her colleagues on the Executive subcommittee and, indeed, right across the entire Executive. A lot of work was put in across Departments and across parties to come up with this document, which everyone here in the Chamber, or most of us anyway, will agree to. Some people might think that an arrangement where various parties come

together and come up with a strategy for the next 20 years of Northern Ireland's economic development is too cosy. I happen to think that it is something that the people out there, particularly those who have been badly affected by the economic downturn, want to see us doing in this place. What we have here in this very thorough and comprehensive piece of work is exactly the sort of thing that the people of Northern Ireland not only want but need.

As the Minister just said, this must be taken alongside the other documents, including, primarily, the Programme for Government. I am glad that we, as an Executive and as an Assembly, have resisted the temptation to go in a different direction as a result of the ill effects of the economic downturn and that we have retained, as we did in the previous Programme for Government, the focus on the economy. Every one of us should believe — if we do not, we ought to start to believe — that the best way out of the ill effects of the downturn and the best way to get people out of poverty in the longer term is to provide them with jobs — sustainable, meaningful, long-term employment. That is exactly what this strategy is all about developing.

I welcome the structure of the document. Perhaps if it had been penned a number of years ago, there would have been less of a focus on the need to rebuild the economy and more on rebalancing. However, economic circumstances have prevailed, and we have to have a balance in the document between rebuilding our economy in the short term and rebalancing our economy in the long term.

I am glad that there is a focus in the document on the agrifood sector — a focus that was highlighted by other Members in their contributions. I know from my constituency that agrifood is the growth sector, as it is across Northern Ireland.

I was recently at the opening of an extension to Willowbrook Foods. It has invested in the region of £5.5 million in an extension to its factory that has allowed the company to get more multimillion pound contracts from supermarkets across the water in Great Britain. It is a growth sector in my constituency, as it is in many others.

Agrifood is already a big sector, with around 20,000 employees and three times that in the supply chain. It realises £3.2 billion of economic output every year. It is a big sector that has the potential to get bigger, and this document recognises and builds us towards that. It has bucked the trend of the past number of years. Whereas the construction sector and retail have had a very bad time, the agrifood sector in Northern Ireland has grown. It is rightly identified as a key growth sector, and it has the potential to help in the aims of rebuilding and rebalancing, because it is growing and can therefore provide additional employment here and now for people, as in the example of Willowbrook Foods in my constituency. It can provide opportunities where that may not be the case elsewhere, and, because it has that growth potential, it has the opportunity to play its part in helping to rebalance our economy. I welcome the fact that agrifood is in the economic strategy as a key balancing measure and that it has been identified as one of those five key business areas that we can further exploit as an economy.

There are ambitious targets, and I heard other Members say that we need to follow the ambitious targets of other devolved regions in the UK. I agree with that; we should be going in that direction, and I welcome the commitment

to develop a strategy to take the industry towards 2020. I do not think that the growth targets of 60% in Scotland are overly ambitious for Northern Ireland, not least because there is an increasing global demand for food, with changing habits, particularly in areas such as China and elsewhere, where huge populations are becoming more westernised in their food consumption. That creates opportunities for some of those companies here in Northern Ireland. I welcome that focus on the agrifood sector from a constituency basis and from a wider strategic Northern Ireland basis. It has been treated sometimes as a bit of a Cinderella sector, yet it is one of the pillars of our economy now and will, hopefully, remain so.

The second issue I wanted to focus on is more on the rebalancing side, namely the correct focus in the document on our pursuit and hopeful attainment of the power to adjust corporation tax here in Northern Ireland. Some Members, particularly from the SDLP and Sinn Féin, have spoken in the debate about a desire for tax-raising or revenue-raising powers. One Member was critical about this document not having a focus on getting tax-raising powers, but it has a key focus on getting corporation tax powers.

When arguments are put forward for strategic reasons for getting tax-varying powers — I am thinking primarily of air passenger duty — they get an open and welcome reception from all Benches. I am still mystified and perplexed that, when these issues are raised by some Members opposite, they are just thrown out there with no explanation as to what tax-raising power the Member wants to have devolved to Northern Ireland, and, more importantly, what they would do with it if they got it. In Mrs Kelly's contribution, I noted that she mentioned the need for increased resources here, there and everywhere, and then started talking about getting more tax-raising powers for this Assembly. That concerns people like me because, if we were to get those tax powers, it would mean that taxes would go up to fund all the things that she wants to give increased funding to. That is a cause for concern for those of us who want to keep a low tax base here in Northern Ireland.

I want to draw Members' attention to the importance of keeping the focus on corporation tax. A report published by 'The Economist' magazine over the past few days includes a survey of key FDI decision-makers with knowledge of Ireland and businesses that are already in Ireland. Around 350 key people who take decisions on existing or future developments in Ireland were surveyed by the magazine.

Nearly half of those quizzed said that a low corporate tax base was a key cornerstone — that is what they called it — of the Republic of Ireland's ability to attract FDI. We know that there are obviously other factors involved in attracting foreign direct investment; we are not delusional. It is absolutely no use having a low rate of corporation tax and having people interested, if you do not have the skills and the infrastructure to capitalise on that. But for half of those taking the decisions, who are from key, big North American companies, in particular —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Time is up.

**Mr Hamilton:** — said that a low corporation tax rate was the key to their decision. As I say, it was described as a cornerstone —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Sorry; time is up.

**Mr Hamilton:** — of Ireland's foreign direct investment proposition. The other key components are things that we already have such as access to EU markets and so forth.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Time.

**Ms Ritchie:** First, as a Member for a constituency that is celebrating a very important event this week, I would like on behalf of all the people of South Down to wish everybody a very happy St Patrick's Day for Saturday. After all, tourism is a principal driver of the local economy. In that respect, I was very happy to see the President of Ireland, as well as the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in south Down last night celebrating Patrick. I want to emphasise that Patrick began and ended his ministry there. The Minister will know that I want to see full development of the assets and the product in relation to Patrick. That means that an investment of resources to do the simple things well and to ensure that tourists have access to those products.

On another point to do with another economic driver, the document says:

*"Move 114,000 working age benefit clients into employment".*

Everybody knows that to have a successful economic strategy — I welcome the economic strategy — you have to have job creation. So, in respect of that figure, I would like the Minister to clarify where those jobs are. Are they real? Are they new? Are they existing jobs being filled by new recruits, because the original occupants have either retired, moved to another post or died? Are they permanent positions? Are they work placements? Are they for a trial period? What is the nature of those jobs? Above all, are they secure and pensionable? Are they worthwhile? Are they reasonably paid? What is the position? Are they paid at the minimum wage or below it?

There are references to that not only on page 14 but on pages 16, 84 and 88 of the document. So, it is important that that issue be clarified, because we do not want to see any distortion of the figures. We want full clarification. In her winding-up speech, the Minister need not revert to suggesting that this is a matter for the Department for Employment and Learning. It is very much a matter for the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, as she has direct responsibility for the job creation agencies.

From taking a cursory look at the document, I do not see much reference to the enterprise companies. I have to say that the enterprise companies located in each of the district council areas performed a very useful function for start-up businesses by ensuring that they were based on the bedrock, that they grew, that they had adequate job creation targets and that they developed new business ideas before they moved on to another location either in self-bought premises or in another industrial park. Will the Minister clarify the position on those enterprise companies and what funding will be made available for them?

Renewable energy is another new driver for the economy. I note the target of 40% by 2020 and the intermediate target of 20% by 2015. So, we are going to add 20% between 2015 and 2020.

How and will that happen? Is it a realistic figure? What is the evidence base upon which that figure is classified?

**3.30 pm**

I realise that other Members might wish to speak and that the Minister is due to respond in five minutes' time. Although I commend the document, I want to see clarification on actual jobs because it is not good enough to replicate figures in a document without a proper evidence base. Therefore, we want to see the evidence base on that issue, Minister. Although we want to be positive about the economic strategy, we want to see real jobs to improve people's lives.

**Mr McGlone:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Mr McGlone, I will stop you at 3.35 pm.

**Mr McGlone:** I will try to rattle through my speech as quickly as possible. The SDLP fully recognises the need to rebalance the local economy in order to:

*"improve the wealth, employment and living standards of everyone".*

We fully support the NI economic strategy's stated goal, albeit for 2030, of:

*"An economy characterised by a sustainable and growing private sector, where a greater number of firms compete in global markets and there is growing employment and prosperity"*

Those aims are laudable. With regard to R&D, creativity and improving the skills and employability of the entire workforce — in particular, on the skills issue — the need for skills development in the software sector is increasingly being drawn to my attention. The absence of those skills appears to be inhibiting growth and to be making the North less attractive for software jobs.

None of us could argue with the aims of competing effectively in the global economy, encouraging business growth and developing a modern, sustainable economic infrastructure. Whether the strategy's key rebalancing initiatives will be delivered and succeed in achieving those aims remains to be seen. After all, the previous Programme for Government did not exactly deliver on all its objectives. The Federation of Small Businesses has observed in the latest Executive documents that many commitments have already been announced, with some progressing towards delivery while others are more aspirational.

By no means do I wish to belittle the ambition behind the economic strategy. Indeed, we can fully support its objectives. However, a number of unknowns have not been taken into account fully. By 2015, there will be another UK Government spending review; the strategy acknowledges that it will have to be updated in light of it. We do not yet know any details of the timely and affordable manner for devolving the power to vary corporation tax that the Executive are to agree with the UK Government. In six months' time, we might do.

Perhaps the most honest aspect of the economic strategy is its setting out of the critical factors that combine to form the economic context in which the Executive find themselves, such as continued uncertainty in global and national economies and the capacity for companies to access suitable finance. I would appreciate it if the Minister could provide details of the loan fund, which is a good idea with great potential for small business.

The impact of the UK-wide welfare reform agenda, which has implications for people in the North, the scope of the NI Executive to support company development under revised EU regional-aid guidelines, and longstanding structural issues will continue to hamper economic growth in the North. We all know that there is significant decline in economic output in most advanced economies throughout Europe. The global recession has contributed to a marked reduction in output in most sectors of the economy, particularly construction. The number of unemployed people has grown. It is astonishing that the economic strategy consultation document's assessment of the impact of the UK Government's welfare reforms was simply that it would produce an increase in the pool of labour that is available for work. My colleague Ms Ritchie referred to that. Those welfare reforms will create a major challenge for the economy. However, cheap labour is hardly a benefit.

In a global climate of uncertainty, the depressed housing market, cuts in public spending and banks' unwillingness to lend for private development all contribute to an increasingly gloomy economic forecast. The principles in the economic strategy are fine, but we need to see the outworking of the details.

I referred to the construction industry earlier, and as the chair of the Assembly's all-party working group on construction, I am very aware of the severe difficulties that that key sector of our economy faces. The measures that the economic strategy commits to in order to assist the construction industry are to be welcomed. For example, there are plans for key road and rail projects and the building of approximately 8,000 social and affordable homes over the next four years. Nevertheless, as identified in the economic strategy, there is a 34% fall in capital departmental expenditure limits between 2010-11 and 2014, which has resulted in the postponement of a number of key capital projects.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Will the Member please draw his remarks to a close?

**Mr McGlone:** In conclusion, given its reference to "renewable energy" and "sustainable development", a glaring omission from the economic strategy is the green new deal. The continued absence of a properly funded green new deal demonstrates a lack of commitment to sustainable investment by the Executive.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Your time is up.

**Mr McGlone:** That matter needs to be addressed seriously as a potential source of economic growth and job creation.

**Mrs Foster:** The Executive have taken the important step of again making the economy the top priority in the Programme for Government. As I said at the outset, the economic strategy is a key building block in the delivery of that commitment and sets the direction of the Executive's economic policy until 2030.

I thank Members for the points that they raised, many of which echoed what we heard during the public consultation exercise. As I said in my opening remarks, I have worked to ensure that the main points raised by stakeholders were addressed in the final version of the strategy.

To recap, we have increased the targets for the growth of manufacturing exports, the investment that is leveraged through Invest Northern Ireland's support of foreign and locally owned companies and, of course, tourist numbers and revenues. The final version of the strategy also includes additional commitments for youth unemployment, exports to emerging economies, investment supported through the job fund, and economic inactivity. We have had very little discussion about economic inactivity today. That was slightly disappointing, but I will return to it later.

I welcome Members' support for the economic strategy and, in particular, the priority that has been attached to the economy by the Executive in the Programme for Government and economic strategy. I also welcome the support for the strategic focus on export-led economic growth and, importantly for me — I am sure that it is also important for the rest of the Executive — the fact that the strategy was developed across the Executive and was led by the Executive's subcommittee on the economy.

I want to return to some of the specific points that Members raised. As I said, I particularly welcome Members' endorsement of the increased targets; that reflects the need to be more ambitious in our economic strategy, and we have tried to do that. The Chair of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment raised the issue of certain commitments that were included in the draft document but were not present in the final economic strategy. He specifically mentioned the removal of a commitment to support first-time exporters. However, that commitment is on page 63 of the strategy, which states that we will:

*"Encourage first time exporters by promoting 60 start ups selling outside UK markets",*

and:

*"Promote a further 440 new start ups selling to GB".*

The commitment is there. It may have moved from where it was in the draft strategy, but it is still present in the current document. I want to assure Members that we are fully committed to the delivery of all our commitments, whether they are in the strategy document or in the comprehensive action plan that was launched on the strategy's website today.

The Chair also commented on the need to have outcome-based targets and to monitor the strategy. I would have thought that he was best placed to do that, given that he is Chair of the Committee. We have an action plan that is open and transparent, and the strategy is a living document, which, I am sure, will be looked at time and again.

He raised the issue of cross-departmental delays as a concern. I can understand why he would have that concern, and I am sure that other Members share it. However, I take comfort from the fact that the Programme for Government's first priority is the economy, and, therefore, across government, the economic strategy should be a priority not only for my Department but for every Department.

There has been a lot of talk from the opposite Benches that we do not include the green new deal in the strategy. That is not correct. Indeed, throughout the economic strategy, we have made many mentions of the green economy and the need to develop a sustainable energy sector. If Members

wish me to take them through that page by page, I am happy to do so.

Tom Buchanan, the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning, endorsed the close working relationship between DETI and DEL in a number of areas. Indeed, just yesterday, I had a further meeting with the Minister for Employment and Learning to discuss matters of mutual interest. Mr McGlone made a point about ICT skills, and that is certainly one of the issues on which we are focused at present. As a Mid Ulster MLA, he will be interested to know that we are also focusing on skilled engineering because we feel that there is a gap at present in the number of skilled engineers who are available for many of the engineering companies, particularly in County Tyrone, which is the hub of our engineering focus. There is work to be done on that, which we will develop.

Pat Doherty, the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development, said that the importance of the economic infrastructure in a global market is vital to the economic strategy, and I agree with him entirely. He mentioned, in particular, the importance of the abolition of air passenger duty on international long-haul flights. That was a huge success for us, which we should recognise. Economic infrastructure is vital, and one of the benefits of a cross-departmental approach is that we can include those sorts of things in the economic strategy.

Sandra Overend expressed concern that the consultation had finished only towards the end of February and yet here we are with our strategy. As I said in my opening comments, the framework for the document was consulted on a year ago. We had a three-month consultation period, which was over Christmas, but it lasted longer than Christmas. Perhaps some Members had longer Christmas holidays than others. It was suggested that I had little time to consider changes. I say to Mrs Overend and to the rest of the House that I do not wait until the end of a consultation period before I know where a document needs to be changed or looked at again. I had been considering what was being said very early on in the consultation and whether there was a continuing trend through those discussions. I had many meetings with the Business Alliance and the Federation of Small Businesses to keep alongside businesses and know what they thought was needed in the economic strategy so that we could make changes in a focused way at the end of the consultation. That is precisely what we were able to do.

I turn to the target for 25,000 jobs. I recall that when I launched the draft economic strategy, some Members felt that the target was much too ambitious. Some Members are now saying that it is not good enough. Mrs Overend said that Invest Northern Ireland had been a failure, despite the fact that — she should know this because she sits on the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment — between 2007-08 and 2009-2010, it had secured almost £2.6 billion in investment commitments and £487 million in annual salaries, promoted 15,565 new jobs, safeguarded 5,329 existing jobs and supported 8,267 new local business starts. It hit every single one of its targets. If that is the Member's definition of failure, I would have thought that, coming from the Ulster Unionist Party, she would have had a better definition of failure. However, I certainly do not believe that that is the definition of failure.

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

**3.45 pm**

**Mrs Foster:** I see that as the definition of success. I will support Invest Northern Ireland as it continues on with that success, and I will give way to the Member.

**Mrs Overend:** Thank you, Minister. I am sure that when she has a look at the Hansard report later, she will see that I did not say that Invest Northern Ireland was a complete failure. I said that it had failed in that was handing back £39.1 million to the Executive. That was a specific failure of Invest Northern Ireland.

**Mrs Foster:** I do look forward to reading the Hansard report because I distinctly recall that she said that Invest Northern Ireland was a failure and then went on to say why she felt that it was a failure. She also said that the jobs fund is not working, and I firmly reject that assertion. The £19 million jobs fund consists of a range of job creation measures to include support for new business starts and young people not in employment, education or training and broader support for social enterprise. It has already created almost 900 new jobs across various measures and there is a good pipeline of over 125 projects. Collectively, those projects have the potential to create over 1,600 jobs, and, in addition, the Member should note that the PFG and the economic strategy now contain a clear commitment to develop a new strategy for tackling economic inactivity through skills, training, incentives and job creation. That is a new target that has been put in there as a result of the consultation that has taken place.

It is also suggested that we have not made much progress with our own national Government on the issue of corporation tax. As I indicated in my opening statement, we have had two very productive meetings with the Exchequer Secretary and progress is being made. Of course, we are talking about the cost, which is a key issue for us, but I remind Members that that is a United Kingdom Government initiative and that they are leading on the matter. However, I look forward to a successful outcome on the discussions with Her Majesty's Treasury by the summer.

Many Members mentioned construction. I pay tribute to the work of Mr McGlone and the all-party working group on construction. It is an absolutely key sector, and that is why, only last month, we put out a capital programme of £580 million. The key element to that is that it is shovel-ready, and that is what the construction sector needs to see. Social enterprises were also mentioned, but they are, of course, heavily referenced in the Programme for Government and in the economic strategy at page 59.

Mr Lunn welcomed the strategy. He mentioned the green new deal, and as I said, the document makes various references to it. He said that Invest NI is a success story but that there is a need for flexibility, and I could not agree more. If we were to have that flexibility, other Members would not be able to misrepresent, in the crass way that they often do, what was happening with money that was handed back. A fuller understanding is needed of why we are restricted in that fashion, and I wish to see more flexibility in that. I know that that is the issue that Mr Lunn was referring to.

Some Members said that more should be done about the green economy. In paragraph 1.16 of the strategy, we have indicated that the MATRIX group is conducting analysis into the market opportunities that are presented by the green

economy sector and, indeed, how the Executive can further support business in that area. In the past, a MATRIX study on other sectors has been hugely beneficial to us, and it will be vital in supporting the commitment that we have already made in the strategy to encourage and develop the green economy and the sustainable energy sector.

Mr Flanagan, a Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, said that he did not want us to operate in silos and felt that that was a possibility if we did not have a dedicated jobs strategy. The importance of the strategy is that it is a cross-departmental strategy and, therefore, the risk of operating in silos should be minimised. He welcomed the work that we are doing on energy costs and the fact that we are working with Invest NI on a new way of trying to help companies with those costs.

Dolores Kelly, in an intervention, said that there was no mention of the natural gas pipeline. I refer her to page 70 of the document, which talks about further development of the natural gas network.

A common theme from Sinn Féin Members during the debate was the need for greater fiscal autonomy. Indeed, reference was made to the fact that when it does not suit, NIO Ministers and direct rule Ministers are not really interested in talking to local Members about tax powers. It is rather unfair to say that. I have already mentioned air passenger duty, and it is simply not true to say that they were tardy when we look at the joint work that took place between Her Majesty's Government and us on air passenger duty. That was a success. It is in this year's Finance Bill, and I hope that it will give us the opportunity to do more about international travel to Northern Ireland.

Mr Flanagan made his usual comments about Invest Northern Ireland and the IDA having joint offices. It will simply not work. We are in competition with the Republic of Ireland for foreign direct investment. The Member and I live in the same area, and the issue is brought home to me when I am told of local companies and foreign direct investors in Northern Ireland being approached by the IDA to move their facilities to the Republic of Ireland. I do not know how he thinks that would work when they are trying to poach some of our companies. However, maybe he would like to develop that issue further in the future.

Mr McKay made comments about tax-raising powers and mentioned the visa waiver scheme. He has mentioned that to me before, and I have answered questions on it. The fundamental issue with the visa waiver scheme is that I am told by our Government that the Republic of Ireland needs to come up to the level of UK protection and status so that visitors can move throughout these islands.

Paul Frew, the Chair of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, indicated that there was a real need to be positive about the economy to engender confidence to assist growth. I could not agree with him more. That is true whether I talk to the retail sector or to big business in Northern Ireland. They all mention to me the problems that they encounter because of a lack of confidence in our economy. He mentioned the construction industry and the need for us to be proactive, and I know that the Member is aware that we had a Crossrail event in the House of Lords recently hosted by none other than Lord Empey, one of the former leaders of the Ulster Unionist Party, to assist us to

get companies to engage with big business in Crossrail so that they could get into the supply chains. That was a very worthwhile event, and I would like to see that replicated on other large-scale construction sites.

He said that there was a need to have confidence in the agrifood sector. That is one of our hidden growth stories, and I have consistently tried to support it and will continue to do so. I know he is aware that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and I appointed a chair of the agrifood strategy board, and we look forward to working with Tony O'Neill and the other members of the board when they are appointed so that we can grow the agrifood sector even further.

Mr Dunne mentioned tourism and talked about the Titanic signature project and the importance of golf, particularly to North Down. He mentioned the 6,000 work experience places and the need to have the employer subsidy. He mentioned the impact of crime and the fact that energy costs were really a barrier to business growth, and we are trying to deal with that through what we are doing with Invest Northern Ireland. He also commented that there was a need to progress with the North/South interconnector. That is absolutely critical.

He referred to the research and development funding and the barriers that were visible to him and the other members of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee under framework programme 7, the need for Horizon 2020 to be more attractive to local businesses and the need to be smart. That is something that the Chair of the Committee mentioned to me this morning.

Mrs Dobson concentrated her comments on the importance of the agrifood sector and the fact that it is one of Northern Ireland's largest employers. I agree with her that it is one of the sectors that can give subregional growth in a way that some other sectors cannot, and it can, therefore, help us with our economic competitiveness. I thank her for her comments welcoming the strategy.

Mrs Kelly had a very definite theme. It was, "Please can we have more money and more resources?" However, there was no indication of where the money and resources were going to come from. She indicated that she felt that it was the right overall approach. However, she went on to talk for seven minutes about the gaps in the economic strategy. She asked whether it was going to be a living document. It is. Mr McGlone also referred to the need to reflect other issues that would happen in the future. Those will be reflected in the fact that it is a living document.

She asked about access to finance and felt that the growth loan fund on its own was not enough. Of course, it is not there on its own. We have the growth loan fund of £50 million, the microloan fund of £5 million and the Clarendon co-investment fund of £16 million. Apart from all that, we have the support and advice that is available under the jobs fund, particularly the focus on finance seminars, which offer free consultancy to firms right across Northern Ireland.

Aligned with all that, we will continue to push the banks and to work together in relation to HMRC. It is an issue that the Finance Minister and I have discussed almost daily in the past couple of weeks, as to how we can intervene in relation to those companies that are under increasing pressure from banks and, indeed, from the good old taxman.

Mrs Kelly also raised the recently published Ulster Bank Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), which suggested that business activity was weakening. Of course, I welcome any analysis of the local economy, but as many have indicated today in our debate, it is vital that we do not talk down our own economy and that we do all that we can to support businesses to grow. That is what we are seeking to do in the Executive, and I am sure that it is what all in the House seek to do.

The question is what our local banks are seeking to do. The banks that are bringing out those gloomy predictions in relation to our local economy also need to rise to the challenge of doing more to improve business access to finance. I have yet to be convinced that they could not do more to help our small and medium-sized companies to access finance.

Turning to the actions and targets for the tourism sector, it is important to recognise the investment that is already going into that important sector. For example, over £300 million of infrastructural investment combines with a number of distinctive events that will deliver increased visitor numbers and revenue, as outlined in the strategy. We have also taken steps to ensure additional resources for the tourism sector, with £4 million being directed to Tourism Ireland for international marketing and £1 million to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

Mr Robinson thanked me for my work on the economic strategy and in relation to sporting achievement. George, I do try to take credit for a lot of what is in the economic strategy but I am not sure that I can take credit for Rory becoming the number one golf champion. I am not sure that I can take credit for Ulster reaching the Heineken Cup semi-finals.

**Ms Ritchie:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mrs Foster:** I will give way. I am not even sure that I can take credit for Rory Best's absolutely outstanding captaincy of Ireland on Saturday. However, if he wishes to give that to me, I am happy to take it.

**Ms Ritchie:** I thank the Minister for giving way. Notwithstanding the wonderful sporting achievements that have taken place in the North over the past number of weeks, perhaps the Minister will be in a position to answer my query about how 114,000 working-age benefit claimants will move into employment. If she could give a reason for and clarification of that, I would welcome that.

#### 4.00 pm

**Mrs Foster:** If the Member waits until I get to her contribution, I am sure that she will get the clarification that she wants. Maybe the Member is in a hurry to leave the Chamber. If she waits for another six minutes, I am sure that she will get her clarification.

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

Anyway, George, I will get back to the positive issue of sporting excellence in Northern Ireland. Our sporting champions have given us the opportunity to put Northern Ireland on a global stage. I look forward to working with colleagues to raise the game of Northern Ireland in the way in which they have raised their game.

Ms McCann referred to the need for the by-product of a strong economy to be the reduction of poverty. She was pleased to see the inclusion of social clauses, but she felt that there was a need for a definition of social clauses. She referred to the social economy and the importance of community asset transfer. She also referred to the credit union reforms that we hope will come to a conclusion in the near future.

Judith Cochrane talked about the need to have directions and targets, particularly in relation to the costs of division. Of course, the costs of division are covered in the Programme for Government's priority 4. As I said at the beginning of my contribution, the documents need to be cross-read so that we look at all of them in context. It is important that we have a positive note in our economic strategy because we are trying to change global perceptions of our society in Northern Ireland rather than reinforcing perceptions that some people may have.

Mr Moutray talked about the fact that we were operating in a global village. I demonstrated that by the fact that I talked about Mongolia and Saudi Arabia this morning. He felt that our strength was in the United Kingdom economy and that there was a need to have export-led growth.

Mr Boylan, understandably, again raised the situation in Armagh. As he knows, Invest NI officials are proactively engaged with existing and prospective investors to encourage them to consider the Armagh site and the associated infrastructure. He referred to angling; I thought that he said "Anglicans" at one stage but I am reliably told that it was "angling". I am very happy to look at that area with the Minister of the Environment and, if necessary, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. He asked me to look at new solutions for broadband difficulties. He felt that fixed line was the best way to go but he must realise that, in some areas, it is cost prohibitive. New mobile technology is the way to find a solution to some of those problems.

Mr McDevitt felt that energy was not a priority in the strategy. I totally disagree. I referred to 1.16 of the document, the building blocks of the Programme for Government and the strategic energy framework. I refer him to page 42 of the document, where we encourage business growth through the green economy and developing economic infrastructure through energy. Energy and the green economy are very much in the economic strategy, but one has to read the strategy to find the references to the green economy.

Simon Hamilton referred to the agrifood sector, particularly Willowbrook Farm and the potential for growth in a very real and meaningful way. He referred to rebalancing the economy and the importance of corporation tax to the Republic of Ireland economy, as referenced in a recent survey in 'The Economist'.

Ms Ritchie wished us all a happy St Patrick's Day. She has obviously lost that willingness to be positive about things. She asked where the evidence base was in the strategy. I refer her to page 59 of the document, where I detail where all the 25,000 jobs are coming from, including 6,300 jobs in locally owned companies, 6,500 jobs in new start-up businesses and 160 social economy start-ups. In addition, we will enable 300 SMEs to access funding and to grow. All that is set out in the economic strategy. In the jobs to which she referred, there is a misunderstanding about

people coming off benefits and into employment. Those targets are a repeat of those in the previous Programme for Government. DSD measures the number who have come off benefits and gone into employment. It is not a measure of jobs created. The figure for jobs created with Invest Northern Ireland support is 25,000. The figure of 114,000 that she referred to is the number of people who have come off benefits and gone into employment in a different fashion.

**Ms Ritchie:** I thank the Minister for giving way. Will she further clarify whether those are new jobs or is it a case of filling jobs with people who have come off benefits?

**Mrs Foster:** That is what I said. The 25,000 jobs are new. The 114,000 jobs are a target that was set by DSD and, indeed, by DEL —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** May I remind the Minister to draw her remarks to a close, please?

**Mrs Foster:** Yes, I will draw my remarks to a close.

The 114,000 figure is a direct repeat of the same target from the previous Programme for Government.

In closing, I thank all my colleagues on the Executive subcommittee for entering into this cross-departmental work in the way that they did. I also want to thank my departmental officials for their focused work on the document and for their work with officials from other Departments. Despite the economic conditions in which we find ourselves, there are grounds for optimism. We have set out some ambitious objectives and targets in the strategy, and I believe that we are on the road to delivering the Executive's economic vision for Northern Ireland.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly endorses the Northern Ireland economic strategy agreed by the Executive.*



## Ministerial Statement

### North/South Ministerial Council: Environment

**Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):** With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the fourteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in environment sectoral format, which was held in the joint secretariat's offices in Armagh on Friday 2 March 2012. The statement has been agreed with Minister Kennedy. Danny Kennedy MLA, the Minister for Regional Development, and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive. I wish Mr Kennedy, Mr McCallister and any other candidates for the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party the best of luck.

The Irish Government were represented by Phil Hogan TD, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, who chaired the meeting. It is worth pointing out that the Irish Government will take the chair of the presidency of the European Union for six months on 1 January 2013. That will be a critical period in the development of the European Union. We are actively looking to second people from the Department here into the Department in the South to contribute to the Irish EU presidency. That would be of mutual benefit to all.

The Council received a presentation by the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland and the Geological Survey of Ireland on the £4 million — approximately €4.4 million — Tellus border project. The project is being carried out under the EU INTERREG IVa programme and will provide invaluable data to support sustainable environmental management in both jurisdictions. All those present were mightily impressed by the work of the Tellus project, which will be completed in the near future and then be launched publicly. The project will give an intensive picture of the geology of these islands and be an important pathway for mineral development and other environmental issues.

Ministers noted that the North/South working group on water quality met in February 2012. The group will continue to drive and oversee co-ordinated implementation of the river basin management plans under the EU water framework directive. The group will report its progress at a future meeting.

The Council welcomed proposals for Ministers' involvement in the blue flag and green coast schemes awards, including the General Assembly of the Foundation for Environmental Education event in June 2012. I hope to join Minister Hogan on that occasion in order to advertise more fully the quality of the beach environment on the island of Ireland, including here in the North, and how that is important for tourist numbers, tourist spend and the quality of life.

Ministers also noted that ongoing co-operation between officials, including the sharing of lessons learnt and best practice in developing and administering the plastic bag levy in Ireland, had greatly facilitated progress with policy and operational development of a carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland. I want to acknowledge the assistance of Dublin in that regard and note that in the years since the Republic introduced its levy, it has seen a reduction in the use of plastic bags by 90% and a revenue income of around €130 million.

The all-island tyre survey, led by the Department of the Environment (DOE), was welcomed by Ministers. Officials continue to explore opportunities for greater engagement to maximise the environmental benefits and deter illegal operators. I raised with Minister Hogan the ongoing inquiry by the Environment Committee into the issue of tyres and we hope that that work informs the work that the two Governments are taking forward at present.

The Council also noted that the North/South market development steering group had met and concluded that work on joint quality protocols should not proceed, as that work has been overtaken by the development of end-of-waste criteria at EU level. The commencement of the bulky waste reuse management feasibility study, which aims to develop a common approach to bulky waste reuse management in both jurisdictions, was welcomed by the Governments.

The Council also welcomed measures being taken to add value to the 'Irish Recycled Plastic Waste Arisings Study', such as the Plastics Recycling Business Forum held in Dublin in January 2012. The forum provided an opportunity to promote the study and receive feedback from the industry. As I have said before, 70% of plastics on the island go into landfill and only 30% are recycled, and of that 30%, only 30% are recycled on the island of Ireland and 70% are exported for recycling.

Ministers noted that the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government has engaged with the Department of the Environment and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in relation to trans-frontier shipments, movements of mixed municipal solid waste from Northern Ireland to Ireland.

The Council noted that the removal of waste from a site at Ballymartin near Kilkeel was successfully completed in October 2011 and that the total combined tonnage of waste removed from sites at Ballymartin, Slattinagh and Trillick was in the region of 49,000 tonnes. It was reported that it is planned to deal with two further sites in 2012 and a new procurement process is being developed to deal with the remaining sites from 2013 onwards. That is important because the procurement is undertaken by Dublin City Council, which has operational responsibility to move waste from the North to the South and to dispose of it in a responsible manner. The Council noted that the joint enforcement actions dealing with illegal operators are a priority for both Environment Ministers and that Departments continue to target resources on that

The Council also discussed the problem of fuel laundering, which may be placed on the agenda for the NSMC plenary meeting later this year.

The Council welcomed the latest 'Northern Ireland Environment Statistics Report' published on 26 January 2012, which included common environmental indicators, and the forthcoming publication of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) 'State of the Environment Report, Ireland's Environment 2012: An Assessment' and Ministers looked forward to the publication of joint environmental indicators in 'Ireland North and South: A Statistical Profile', which will be published next year.

Ministers also welcomed continued co-operation between both agencies on identification of emerging research needs

and strategic planning of research funding programmes. It was noted that discussions are taking place with InterTradeIreland to organise a targeted framework programme 7 (FP7) environment workshop and that a more general information and guidance day on FP7 for the environment will be hosted by the EPA in June 2012.

#### 4.15 pm

As Members know, FP7 is a €50 billion fund up to 2014 for R&D and innovation. We have not had a good record in the North of Ireland in respect of drawdown from that fund. The notional drawdown from the fund by the Dublin Government is around €600 million over a six-year period. There may still be opportunities to exploit that fund. One of the reasons why I went to Brussels last Friday to engage with senior officials and Ministers was to identify where opportunities may be for FP7 and other EU funding mechanisms.

Under "any other business" during the meeting, Minister Hogan and I discussed fracking, and there may be questions in that regard moving forward. The council agreed to hold the next environment meeting in summer 2012.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** There was interference at the start of the Minister's statement, so I ask Members to check that their mobile phones are off. We do not want to interfere with Hansard's recording. Thank you.

**Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment):** On behalf of the Committee, I welcome the Minister's statement, and I am very pleased to hear that cross-border co-operation on environmental issues has been productive and constructive.

The Minister said that a North/South working group on water quality will continue to drive and oversee co-ordinated implementation of river basin management plans. However, the Committee has been very concerned at the lack of funding for river basin management north of the border, where funding to date seems to be based on piecemeal allocations of tiny grants to groups doing isolated bits of river restoration. That is not the Committee's definition of co-ordinated management. When will we see a fully funded and well-funded programme of integrated river basin management that will deliver the water framework directive requirements for good ecological conditions of Northern Ireland's fresh water by 2015?

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for that question. It is in respect of water management that North/South co-operation over the past number of years has been at its most extensive. Although there may be questions about funding down the stream, to borrow a phrase, nonetheless, the co-operation on management of water on the island of Ireland has been one of the better all-island initiatives arising from the North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meetings and the Good Friday Agreement generally.

As I indicated, I think that that work will escalate and intensify. The conversation that I had with the Minister in respect of fracking, given that the Lough Allen basin is a shared basin, given the need to have as mutual an approach as possible on the planning and environmental side, mindful and respectful of our different authorities, and potentially our different attitudes to fracking, in my view will demonstrate further that on the island of Ireland, there is a co-ordinated approach to water management.

When we see the publication of the Tellus geological survey in a matter of weeks, that will demonstrate, in an explicit, three-dimensional way if you like, how the water on the island of Ireland is a shared resource. Indeed, it may have some application when it comes to fracking because the Tellus mineral survey and images will enable us to identify the way in which water may be extracted from the earth as a consequence of fracking.

To answer the Member's question in particular: I believe very firmly that if we have put in place a working group on water quality, if we have put in place river basin management plans, if we are beginning to work up second-cycle plans for December 2014 and 2015, and given the more demanding water management directives on their way from Europe, it follows that when you have created that narrative and evidence base, money should follow. It is a matter for not just the DOE but the Government to acknowledge that water is a precious resource that we have in abundance — unlike so many other parts of the world that have gone to war over it. I would like to think that as I shape the Department over the next period of time, water management will be something that government will embrace more fully and that money will follow.

**Mr Hamilton:** A constant feature of the discussions at North/South Ministerial Council meetings on the environment is the need to repatriate to the Irish Republic waste that is dumped illegally in Northern Ireland. Will the Minister update the House on the number of sites that have been identified in Northern Ireland where there is the need for repatriation of waste? Will he also update the House on the cost of that exercise to the Northern Ireland Executive to date?

**Mr Attwood:** Now you are going to test my memory, but that is typical of Mr Hamilton. As far as I recall, there are 13 sites of illegal dumping. However, I will verify that and let the Member know. There have been three sites where repatriation has occurred. There was meant to be a fourth site in the latter part of last year. However, it did not happen because although there was a small illegal dump off the Belfast Road in Newry, when it came to the removal of the material, it was discovered that it had been moved already. So, not only had it been dumped illegally, it had then been moved illegally. There are ongoing investigations on both sides of the border in respect of that matter.

The cost is borne heavily by the Southern authorities. Under the framework agreement reached by the two Governments on the matter, the obligation fell to the Southern authorities primarily to the scale of, I think, 90% of total expenditure, because the waste had been moved from the South to the North. I hope that there will be prosecutions in the fullness of time arising from one or more of the repatriated sites, including ongoing live investigations at Ballymartin. I cannot recall the total cost involved but it runs into millions of pounds ultimately.

We need to ensure that we push on with the repatriation of waste. That is why I raised with Phil Hogan the need to ensure that, whatever procurement exercise is ongoing in Dublin on this matter, there was no uncertainty that the two sites identified for repatriation this year will be cleared, that there should be alternative mechanisms, including landfill if necessary, to accommodate that waste, and that no uncertainty should arise as to the accommodation of waste.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement. Point seven relates to exploring opportunities. Does the Minister have any more details about that? Point nine concerns the feasibility study. Is there a timeline or finishing date for that?

**Mr Attwood:** My statement did not have the numbers that you referred to. Mr McGlone is giving me a copy. Point seven relates to the all-Ireland tyre survey. The situation is that a tender has been awarded and the contractor appointed for the tyre survey. That work will commence, and there will be a report in the fullness of time. That work, as well as the Committee for the Environment's investigations into issues around tyres, will help inform how we move that forward. At the same time, the Department is independently identifying any and all opportunities that might arise for the proper disposal of tyres, whether it is crumbing, export or alternative uses.

I will have to come back to the Member with the details in respect of the second issue — the feasibility study. I undertake to do so.

**Mr Kinahan:** I thank the Minister for the statement. It is always good to see people working together. You mentioned that there was sharing of lessons learnt and best practice in delivering and administering the plastic bag levy. Will the Minister expand on what those lessons were and what we can gain? We need the funding from the plastic bag levy to deal with the matters that Anna Lo raised.

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for his question. The scope of the current and future law in Northern Ireland is more extensive than it is in the Republic and Wales. We have drawn conclusions about their experience, especially the Republic of Ireland, given that its law has been in existence for a period. The Southern law covers only plastic bags. It does not extend to the scope of the current law in the North, namely single-use bags. It does not extend to the forthcoming law, which is subject to the agreement of the Assembly, in respect of lower-priced reusable bags. The scope of our law is much more extensive than current provisions in the Republic of Ireland. Nonetheless, on the operational side of the levy, we have learnt from the South about how to collect and administer the levy and advertise the fact that the levy will be in place from April 2013, with an enhanced levy process from April 2014.

It is on the operational, management and logistical side that we have learnt most. If that leads to a revenue stream for government in the fullness of time, it will be welcome. However, that is not the primary purpose or ambition of the legislation passed last year or the scheme to be implemented next year. It is an environmental measure, and that is its primary focus. It may well be the case that, in year 1, year 2 and year 3 of the new levy regime, the revenue will not be what we would like it to be, which will prove that this is an environmental intervention as opposed to a financial one. However, if, in the fullness of time, we are able to reduce single-use and cheap reusable bag use by 90% and attract some revenue at the same time, that will be a win-win for all.

**Mr McGlone:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagraí. I thank the Minister for his answers to questions on the joint

meeting. Minister, you referred to the emphasis on the water on the island being a shared resource, and it most definitely is. Indeed, given your own very welcome Marine Bill here in the North, what about the marine area and the water around the shores of our island, which, in its entirety, is likewise a shared resource? Has your Department considered doing any work with the authorities in Dublin and Minister Hogan, the responsible Minister, to harmonise a marine Bill or marine management for the entire island?

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member. I share the aspiration, if it is implicit in the question. The opportunities to manage resources on the island of Ireland are, to borrow a phrase, yet untapped. Those include issues around environmental management, marine management and other possible interventions. I advised the Dublin Government that we tabled and have had the Second Stage of a Marine Bill. Given the issue of water management and marine management, there is an obligation on me to inform all those who use, or have responsibility for, marine waters on these islands of our intention to have a Marine Bill.

I would like to aspire to a marine management organisation as part of the Marine Bill in the North of Ireland. I would like to aspire to a marine management organisation for the island of Ireland, but the Dublin Government have indicated to me that they are not inclined to go down that road at this time.

In the economic context that the island faces, the judgement of the Irish Government is that they are not inclined to go down that path. I have explored that opportunity and had a conversation at official level. It may be that, in the fullness of time or with some political input, they might be minded to move from that position.

#### 4.30 pm

That said, if I cannot take this matter further with the Irish Government at this stage, it falls to the Northern Ireland Government and to the parties in the Assembly to get their thinking clear on a marine management organisation as part of the Marine Bill. Perhaps those who are nationally minded on this side of the House would like to see the outworking of that in all-Ireland management of various issues, but, if that is not where Dublin is, it falls to parties in this House to recognise that the height of our ambition may be a marine management organisation for Northern Ireland and managing our coastal waters out to 14 miles. I urge parties, including those on this side of the House, to recognise that political reality, not to abandon any future all-Ireland aspiration but to establish mechanisms that best manage our marine waters as part of the Marine Bill and to encourage people to do so.

**Mr Weir:** I thank the Minister for his statement. Earlier on, you were complaining about interference in his statement. On behalf of this side of the House, I reassure the Minister that we have no desire to interfere with him in any way, shape or form.

It is good to see our southern friends taking a sensible attitude towards a marine management organisation, but I refer the Minister to the important issue of the cross-border movement of waste. We all welcome the moves that have been made to date, but the statement says that the intention is to have a new procurement process to deal with the remaining sites from 2013 onwards. Can the Minister clarify whether there is any projected end date for that

process? We all want to see a situation in which all waste is got rid of.

**Mr Attwood:** I may have been able to give some reassurance to Mr Weir in relation to the Irish Government's ambition about a marine management organisation, but I do not want to give him any reassurance in respect of the ambition about North/South matters generally. I have a sense — I put it no higher than that — that the delay in the roll-out of the St Andrews review, which is now approaching five years, in terms of the assessment of current North/South structures and the potential for future North/South structures, is beginning to cause frustration. I do not know how many times I have heard that the next NSMC plenary will address the matter, and that is what I hear in respect of the plenary in June. I hope that it will address the matter and that the consequence is that we grasp the opportunities that clearly exist on a North/South basis, not least on the issue of health, at a time of economic need when we can improve services, reduce costs, protect jobs and serve the interests of all. That is not political or party political; that is looking at the realities of the situation in respect of the North.

I welcome Mr Weir's comment that he does not interfere with the operation of a Ministry. He might want to tell some of his Executive colleagues that when it comes to the review of public administration, but that is for another day. However, the point around procurement is well made and timely. Given the number of sites that we have and the commitment and urgency to repatriate, there needs to be certainty about the processes around repatriation.

I said to Minister Hogan at the NSMC meeting two Fridays ago that we needed to have certainty. Given that there will be a new procurement process in the South in respect of various matters, including the repatriation of waste, we need to ensure that, whatever happens around that process, whatever time it might take, whatever legal challenge may arise — procurement exercises are sometimes subject to legal challenge — we need to have certainty that this year and next year, while they work through the procurement exercise, we will have alternative methods for the disposal of waste. I am pleased to say that Mr Hogan acknowledged the point. While they hope to create certainty around procurement sooner rather than later, they recognise the need for certainty when it comes to the repatriation of waste. So, this summer and into the autumn and next summer and into next autumn, procurement will not get in the way of repatriation, and the repatriation schedule will be honoured over the next two years and beyond.

**Mr Dallat:** I thank the Minister for his statement. A lot of discussion has taken place on the illegal waste coming north. I would like to focus the Minister's attention on the used tyres that have been going south, largely to the beautiful boglands of Donegal. Does the Minister agree that there is an absolute need for the closest co-operation between North and South to ensure that the used tyre industry does not become as lucrative as fuel laundering has for the criminal element who make their fortune out of moving stuff across the border, one way or the other?

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for his question. The environmental crime unit of DOE/NIEA, as I have said, is the environmental police officer of the Northern Ireland Government, trained to policing standards and with policing powers and the rigour of good policing behind it. I assure the

Member that, where there are serious issues around waste, including serious issues around any element of waste, the ECU is on top of the matter, subject to the resources that it has. That is why, over the past number of months, it has conducted an employment exercise to bring 11 specialist staff into the organisation to bring it closer to complement. The purpose of that exercise was to ensure that serious environmental crime in the North, whatever its character, is interrogated, pursued and prosecuted. That, if necessary, will extend to the issue raised by Mr Dallat, namely the disposal of tyres in an illegal way, if that is the case. The illegal disposal of tyres on a cross-border basis will involve the EPA in the South, the Garda Síochána and other relevant agencies. Beyond that, I will not say anything, because, as you will appreciate, there are ongoing investigations into serious environmental crime and ongoing cases before the courts. I am aware of those investigations and the cases before the courts. Due process must prevail at all times in respect of all those matters. I endorse, in principle, the point that the Member made.

## Executive Committee Business

### **Dog Control Orders (Prescribed Offences and Penalties, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**

**Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):** I beg to move

*That the draft Dog Control Orders (Prescribed Offences and Penalties, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.*

The draft Dog Control Orders (Prescribed Offences and Penalties, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 are made under sections 40(4), 41(1) and 41(3) of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. The Act requires that they be laid in draft and approved by a resolution of the Assembly.

I acknowledge the work of the Environment Committee on 8 March and the support of my Executive colleagues at the Executive meeting on 23 February in respect of the regulations. I am pleased to bring forward the draft regulations, which form an important part of the new dog control order regime that has been introduced under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. The Act strengthened the powers available to district councils to help them to deal more effectively with a range of local environmental quality problems.

District councils receive hundreds of complaints about dogs every year and spend thousands of pounds cleaning dog fouling from our streets and public spaces. At present, district councils can make use of dog fouling provisions in the Litter (NI) Order 1994 and can make by-laws to control dogs on certain areas of land. That system is onerous for central and local government, with each by-law having to be examined individually. It often results in delays and extra work for councils and the Department. The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act repeals the dog fouling provisions of the Litter Order and replaces the dog by-law system with a new simplified system that will enable district councils to make dog control orders to apply offences aimed at the control of dogs to specified land in their area. To fully establish the new system, additional subordinate legislation is required to provide more detail on the offences, penalties and forms of order for the new system. That is today's business.

The draft regulations provide for five offences that may be prescribed in a dog control order. The offences are failing to remove dog faeces; not keeping a dog on a lead; not putting or keeping a dog on a lead when directed to do so by an authorised officer; permitting a dog to enter land from which dogs are excluded; and taking more than a specified number of dogs onto land. There are defences, in all dog control orders, of having a reasonable excuse for failing to comply with an order or acting with the consent of the owner or occupier of the land or any other person or authority that has control of the land. The Department has drafted the regulations to take into account the needs of those with disabilities who rely on assistance dogs by providing exemptions from certain dog control orders in such cases.

To ensure consistency and clarity between councils, the draft regulations specify the content and form of the types of dog control order. The draft regulations also prescribe

the maximum penalty that may be provided for in a dog control order, which is, on summary conviction, a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale, currently £1,000. Councils will also have the option of offering someone who commits an offence under a dog control order the opportunity to pay a fixed penalty in lieu of prosecution. The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act enables a council to set its own rate of fixed penalty within the range of £50 to £80. If a council chooses not to do so, the rate will be automatically set at £75. That is a 50% increase in the current rate of £50 and aims to serve as a stronger deterrent to potential offenders. Councils will, of course, be able to retain the receipts from fixed penalties and use them for local environmental quality functions.

To allow district councils to phase in the new regime in a way that suits their particular circumstances, the dog fouling offence in the Litter Order will remain in force until such time as a dog control order is made for the same land; thus, there will be no vacuum. Similarly, existing by-laws will continue in force indefinitely and continue to be enforced as normal, until a council makes a dog control order dealing with the same offence on the same area of land. At that point, the by-law will cease to have effect.

Public consultation on the draft regulations took place between 23 March and 15 June last year. We received 31 responses, and, in the main, consultees were supportive of what is proposed. The regulations will assist in targeting irresponsible dog owners who fail to clean up after their dogs and will help to ensure that dogs are kept adequately under control so that people and dogs can live happily and safely together. I am confident that the regulations will contribute to an improvement in dog control and, therefore, an improvement in the quality of our towns, cities and countryside. I ask the Assembly to approve the draft regulations.

**Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment):** The Committee considered initial proposals for the regulations on 22 September 2011. Members were content for the Department to proceed with the policy. The regulations are in accordance with the overarching primary legislation, the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act. In general, the Committee is very supportive of the Act and recognises its potential to improve the local environment by giving district councils additional powers to deal with problems such as litter, graffiti and fly-posting, abandoned and nuisance vehicles, noise and dogs.

#### **4.45 pm**

At Committee Stage, the previous Committee sought advice from the Examiner of Statutory Rules on the powers that the Bill contained for the Department to make subordinate legislation. Regulations involving the creation of criminal offences were already subject to affirmative procedure in the Bill, and the Committee felt that that was appropriate. In addition, the Examiner of Statutory Rules drew the Committee's attention to the fact that the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill provided for regulations that would allow the Department to make orders substituting a new amount for fixed penalty payments specified in the Bill. The Examiner suggested that there was a strong argument, based on the precedent of other Assembly legislation, that these regulations too should have the highest level of Assembly control. The

Committee agreed, made a recommendation accordingly and subsequently welcomed the Department's amendments to that effect at Consideration Stage.

As we have heard, the regulations being considered today set out the procedures under which district councils are empowered to make dog control orders. That covers offences that range from failing to keep a dog on a lead to taking more than the maximum permitted number of dogs onto restricted land. It sets the maximum penalty that can be enforced for those offences at level 3, which is currently £1,000.

The Committee considered the draft statutory rule on 8 March, and members were content for me to recommend to the Assembly that it be affirmed.

**Mr Hamilton (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment):** I support the dog control orders. They are a welcome addition to the powers that local councils will have to deal with the issue. We are told that we are a nation of dog lovers, and ownership of dogs in Northern Ireland is very high, certainly if the amount of dog fouling that goes on is anything to go by.

We are all elected with very high ideals, and we want to do this and we want to do that. We want to talk about health or education. I survey people in my constituency, as do many others, and I get feedback through my mailbag and through people stopping me in the street. There is absolutely no doubt that the issue that angers people and elicits the biggest response is the state of our streets, particularly dog fouling. Anything that streamlines and simplifies the process that allows councils to designate areas has to be welcomed. Anything that raises the fine levels, as these orders will, must be welcomed.

It remains to be seen whether the increase in the fixed penalty notices to a maximum of £80 or the maximum fine of £1,000, if it goes to court, is sufficient to deter people. There is absolutely no doubt that the public out there want to see this issue dealt with. There is a swathe of ways in which it can be dealt with, and education is the primary one. However, we want to see punitive disincentives for people. It remains to be seen whether this is enough to deter the thoughtless individuals who let their dogs do their business wherever and do not clean up after them.

I appreciate that dog control orders do not deal solely with dog fouling, although, when you look at it, it is the biggest issue contained in the five powers. It remains to be seen whether it is enough to enhance what is already there. We as an Assembly, the Minister, his Department and officials should continue to monitor whether it has been a success and whether it needs to be built on. The principles inherent in the dog control orders are to be welcomed, and I look forward to seeing them in action in the community.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also support the regulations. There were a lot of complaints from local authorities when the regulations came to the Committee for consultation. This will be an extra mechanism for them to use, and it will hopefully go some way in supporting councils in implementing the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (NI) 2011.

**Mr Kinahan:** I, too, welcome the dog control orders, although I wanted to say one or two other things. I hate seeing too much regulation, and, if common sense had prevailed among

people and councils, we would not have had to go down this route, but we do. One of the biggest complaints that we hear is about dog mess and the lack of control of dogs, as we have heard. We want to see a hard attitude taken on dog mess, but we also want to see the wisdom of Solomon being used about dogs being walked. Not every dog needs a muzzle or a lead, and I think we are passing the buck to our very good dog wardens who will have to enforce this. However, I also hope that we will keep an eye on how successful it is and how much it costs councils. We had a battle in my days as a councillor over a litter fine that was going to cost the person paying it £75 but would cost the council £800 to take it to court. The cost of this must be monitored through the councils. I look forward to seeing the legislation working, and I welcome the regulations.

**Mr Dallat:** Like my colleagues on the Environment Committee, I support the introduction of the regulations. They will be welcomed by everyone, including dog owners, because they are in the interest of the wider community and the environment in which we live. Simon Hamilton is absolutely right that there is no complaint we hear more about than dog fouling, particularly in our towns. We are not passing the buck to our dog wardens; we are passing the buck to the people who own the dogs. The test of the legislation will be its enforcement, and local councils will have a major role to play in that.

The people who will benefit most from this legislation are those who use a wheelchair. It is absolutely disgusting that they have to navigate through dog faeces time and again. People with impaired eyesight are also victims, probably even more so, of those who walk their dogs and do not carry with them the scoops that they should have.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** There are a few conversations going on. I ask Members to give their attention to whoever has the Floor.

**Mr Dallat:** I know, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am disappointed. I spent so much time preparing this exciting speech, and there they are, having wee conversations of their own. *[Laughter.]* I jest only.

The control of dogs in the rural community is a major issue. Most owners keep their dogs under control, but, sadly and regrettably, a few do not, and they will go to the ends of the earth to ensure that the dog warden is not able to prove who owns the dog that went out and massacred a flock of sheep. Those people are small in number, but they have caused thousands of pounds' worth of loss to farmers, and we cannot quantify the suffering to the animals that have been killed.

All in all, the legislation is an important addition to our armoury in ensuring that people can have a pet dog or two, although I note there is a provision not to have a dozen of them on leads. That is welcome, but, at the end of the day, this law will be as good as those who embrace it. The plea we make to dog owners is that they make their contribution to the environment by ensuring that, when they take their dog out, they keep it on a lead, clear up after it, keep it under control and know exactly where it is at all times. I think everybody will then be happy.

**Mr Attwood:** I thank all the Members who contributed to the discussion on the regulations. I again acknowledge the Committee's work in reviewing the regulations and echo the points made by the Committee Chairperson. On a day

when there has been some publicity about the principle and practice of accountability of Ministers in the Assembly and the role of third parties, including the media, in respect of accountability, I sympathise with the view that proceeding by way of affirmative resolution is a process of accountability and of monitoring government actions, and I think that it is useful. The bad news is that, over the past short while, I have instructed my officials to table more oral statements and written statements where it is justified and appropriate to do so, the consequence of which is that Mr Hamilton and his colleagues will have more opportunity to question and cross-examine me on the Floor of the Assembly.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I welcome the Minister's commitment to transparency and, indeed, participative democracy. I share his concerns about those who wish to drive us into a fascist state, and I hope that other Ministers learn from what he said this afternoon. Does he agree that Committees are there to scrutinise as well as to support Ministers?

**Mr Attwood:** The primary role of scrutiny in the Assembly falls to the Committees. There is an argument, which I do not intend to open now, for modelling Committees in the image of the Public Accounts Committee, which more rigorously calls to account the actions of government and, in particular, accounting officers in Departments, namely the permanent secretaries. I agree that we will need to face up to the issue of accountability more and more.

Mr Hamilton rightly pointed out that we all get calls to our constituency offices about dog fouling. I remember a survey being carried out at the height of the years of terror and conflict in my constituency of West Belfast, where the worst things were happening. However, when people in a certain part of the constituency were surveyed, they named dog fouling as the primary issue in that area. So, although people clearly had enormous concerns about the many things going on in their neighbourhood and estate at that time, they also had grave concerns about other issues, and, of all issues, they named dog fouling. As the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment said earlier in respect of the economic strategy, if we are to grow the North's economy through our built and natural heritage, of which the built environment is part, we must realise that the quality of our streets and the issue of dog fouling is part of that narrative and is part of that wider strategy.

I agree with Mr Boylan that the legislation is an extra tool for councils. Although the Department provided a lot of guidance to councils on how the new scheme might operate, we anticipate that this tool will be cost-neutral because, as indicated, it simplifies the process and no money is following the adjusted power to councils. I concur with Mr Kinahan: built into the architecture and practice of the legislation is the fact that councils and the responsible officers in councils will have the discretion to ensure that they get the balance right between, on the one hand, dog control orders and, on the other hand, the needs of dogs to enjoy a healthy lifestyle, just like humans. As Mr Dallat indicated, this is not about passing the buck to anybody, save irresponsible dog owners. That is what the legislation intends to capture — irresponsibility. It will not capture the responsible actions of those who value and love dogs.

I thank Members for their contributions and ask them to support the motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the draft Dog Control Orders (Prescribed Offences and Penalties, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.*

5.00 pm

## Ministerial Statement

### Community Pharmacy

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to update the Assembly on the way ahead on the issues affecting community pharmacy services. Due to events that happened in the previous mandate and with the judicial review, I was not able, until recently, to get involved in identifying a solution. This is a matter that has caused me considerable concern. However, I remain strongly committed and hopeful that we can establish a progressive and sustainable way forward.

As a measure of my personal interest and commitment, I met Community Pharmacy NI (CPNI) on 14 February, which was the earliest opportunity that we had after the final order was made in respect of the judicial review. Since then, there have been several further meetings between representatives of CPNI, my Department and the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) under the chairmanship of my permanent secretary. With my support, a package of measures was offered to CPNI. However, I regret to say that, after consulting its membership, CPNI rejected those proposals. I am disappointed that we could not reach an agreed way forward for 2011-12, but I am hopeful that the measures that I am announcing today will go some way to allowing for a constructive and positive discussion in respect of 2012-13 and beyond.

I want to brief Members on how I intend to proceed. On the immediate issue of the remuneration of pharmacists in 2011-12, it has been necessary to move very quickly as only a few weeks remain in this financial year. Up to this point, some £83.5 million has been provided through the arrangements that were put in place early last year. Today, I am announcing the release to community pharmacies of a further £8 million for 2011-12. That funding will support new services, improve premises and support staffing of community pharmacies, particularly in rural and deprived areas. That investment represents a substantial package for community pharmacy businesses in Northern Ireland in the very difficult budgetary circumstances that face all public services.

The £8 million investment will bring the total to be provided to contractors for remuneration and for aspects of reimbursement in 2011-12 to £91.5 million, which is a further 10% more than the £83.5 million provided to date. The investment includes an additional £4 million in recognition of the concerns raised about the vulnerability of pharmacies located in rural and socially deprived areas. I have been mindful of the specific concerns of the Committee and other MLAs around seeking to preserve services in isolated communities.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and HSCB have attempted to stretch as far as possible to reach an accommodation with CPNI in a very difficult context. I can advise that other proposals were made to CPNI. Indeed, I was willing to endorse an expanded package of measures that would have provided substantially

more in facilitating cash flow and offering the opportunity to generate further income.

I am aware of the difficult testimonies, sent to the Health Committee, about the circumstances that face many individual pharmacy businesses. I made a real offer of assistance, though it was clearly never going to be possible or appropriate to provide additional resources on the full scale sought by CPNI.

I want to step back from the difficult issues that have been in dispute and look ahead, because it is essential that we do not lose sight of the significant opportunities for positive change that exist at present. I welcome the view that CPNI has expressed, which is shared by many in the primary care and other sectors of the health and social care service, that the future of community pharmacy is to play a vital and fundamental role as part of a patient-centred, locally based care system.

It is, clearly, highly regrettable that the reimbursement and remuneration of the community pharmacy sector has been the subject of two recent judicial reviews. I want to make clear my commitment and determination to find a fair and appropriate way ahead on this difficult issue. I have instructed officials to engage as constructively and positively as possible with CPNI in making a difference to the approach to these issues. I have agreed that the most recent judgement should be subject to appeal because of its effect across government. However, my emphasis and priority is to seek agreement and a way ahead that will recognise and support the new and evolving role of community pharmacists in the new world of reformed health and social care services.

In reaching the funding position, we have had to proceed on the best evidence available. What has been missing is evidence from Community Pharmacy NI itself, particularly transparent evidence in the public interest, of the acquisition costs of medicines for use in the health and social care system. I believe that, had it been made available, wider evidence would have aided us in negotiations; without it, we have operated on evidence-based assumptions. Although the Department considers those assumptions to be realistic, if evidence were produced, we would be best placed to identify conclusively what the financial needs of a sustainable pharmacy supply would be. I call on Community Pharmacy NI to provide the further information that the Department requires to move forward. The longer it is withheld, the longer it will take to reach a solution.

I want to assure community pharmacists that I am committed to ensuring that the information-gathering exercise that is now beginning will be conducted in a fair, open and transparent manner. The two key elements are surveys of the profits actually accruing to pharmacists in the present financial regime and the costs of providing those services in Northern Ireland. The surveys will help us to move beyond a dispute over the facts, and the results should provide a single view of the truth and remove the need for further litigation. CPNI will be able to conduct a margins survey without interference on an agreed basis, and I expect that the parallel calculations and assessments by HSCB will produce similar results. I have asked HSCB and the Department to give CPNI the fullest possible opportunity to comment on and influence the conduct of the additional cost survey investigations. However, I have had to insist that



those surveys be kept under my final control; otherwise, there would be unacceptable risks to the timetable required under the recent judgement.

The Department will now act under its statutory powers to initiate a survey, which, in the interests of greater transparency in the use of public money, will validate the level of profit available to pharmacies as a result of pharmacy contractors purchasing medicines on behalf of the health service. I have also asked HSCB to develop and undertake a further study to assess the cost of providing safe, high-quality community pharmacy services in Northern Ireland. That will take account of the pharmaceutical care needs of the population and reflect the views of a number of organisations, including CPNI.

In future, pharmacists will play a much greater role in providing front line care in the community, and it follows that their reimbursement and remuneration need to be modernised to promote and support a new vision and a major new opportunity. That is a clear and vital element of my vision and strategy in 'Transforming Your Care: A Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland.'

I believe that the 'Transforming Your Care' proposals offer community pharmacists the opportunity to strengthen their role in improving medicines management for patients, particularly for those with long-term conditions; help to minimise waste; contribute to the avoidance of unnecessary hospital admissions due to medicines-induced morbidity; and prevent conditions deteriorating by improving concordance. It is a model of care based not on prescription volume and product supply but on health outcomes for patients and on working as a member of the integrated primary care team. The proposals also hold an expanded role for pharmacists in the arena of health promotion in community pharmacy settings and the wider community. That should embrace a community development approach to health and well-being, for which there is good practice and evidence in the building the community-pharmacy partnership programme.

I call on the representative body of community pharmacy contractors to engage with the Department and HSCB in agreeing a new contract that will allow pharmacies to offer help to patients in areas such as medicines management, smoking cessation, health screening and medication reviews in care homes. Those are very much in line with the proactive community-based approach set out in 'Transforming Your Care'.

I believe that the approach that I have set out today provides an important step in the right direction towards a better future for community pharmacies. It will provide a foundation for constructive discussions that will maximise the contribution that that group of skilled and dedicated professionals can make to improving the health of the population and to providing local, high-quality advice and support to patients and the wider community.

**Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for the briefing on the statement that he gave to me and the Deputy Chair earlier today. I agree with the Minister that the future of community pharmacies is vital and that it plays a fundamental role as part of the patient-centred, locally based care system. I am disappointed that no agreement has been reached between the Department, the Health and

Social Care Board and Community Pharmacy NI, and I am concerned that there has been a breakdown in negotiations.

The Minister mentioned the pharmacists' testimonies that were sent to the Committee, which described what they were going through and what they were facing. Those testimonies made stark reading. The Minister's statement outlines less than was offered last week to CPNI. The £8 million that has been released today, although it should be welcomed and we should not knock it, represents only an extra £1.5 million. Will he outline how he proposes to allocate that to community pharmacies? Will he also outline how he proposes to take forward the margins survey and the cost survey in a truly supportive role and in a partnership approach with CPNI?

**Mr Poots:** I will outline the breakdown of the allocation. Compliance with and support of, for example, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which will reduce reliance on multiple dispensing functions and ensure that individuals' needs are addressed, will be allocated £2 million. Rural pharmacies — those which are located at least 1 kilometre from the nearest premises and which dispense fewer than 5,600 prescription items a month — will be given £1.25 million. That accounts for approximately 73 pharmacies. Grants totalling £1.75 million will be allocated for improved security measures, etc, for pharmacies in deprived areas, accounting for around 340 pharmacies. The rural contingency fund will receive £1 million, and transitional support to contractual arrangements to include grant support for premises and staff training will be allocated a further £2 million.

All those allocations were focused on the problems that the Assembly has been telling us about, particularly in relation to community pharmacies in deprived areas and in rural areas. That is why we have sought to put as much money as possible in those directions. I should say that that was resisted by CPNI, which wanted it spread across all locations, but I think that a pharmacist in west Fermanagh probably needs that money more than does Boots at Sprucefield. That is why we have sought to skew the money towards those whom we believe need it most to help to sustain them until we get a better and more comprehensive deal. It is very important that we work to get that deal in 2012-13 and beyond.

**Mr Wells:** There seems to be a fundamental disagreement between the Department and community pharmacists about the actual figures involved. I understand that there was an intent that, before this stage, a survey would have been carried out of the actual retained profits that pharmacists accrued as a result of the purchase and dispensing of drugs. Why has that survey not been carried out up to this point?

**Mr Poots:** We sought to carry out a survey after the first judicial review. However, we did not have the co-operation of the pharmacists in conducting the survey to determine the costs associated with the running of pharmacies or for a separate survey of the profits that can be derived from the business. We sought that information but it was not forthcoming. Therefore, we have had to make evidence-based assumptions, which are the best possible assumptions that can be made by the Department at this point.

I want to make it absolutely clear to the Assembly that pharmacists are looking for one figure and the departmental officials are referring to another figure. I can know the exact

figure of what it should be only when the evidence is provided, and without the evidence being provided by the pharmacists, I cannot move this forward in that respect. If pharmacists are coming to their MLAs and saying that they need a further £38 million, that may be reasonable, but they have to provide evidence to support that. To date, they have not provided the evidence to allow the surveys to be conducted, and until or unless they do, pharmacists will continue to be in the same position as they are now. Therefore, it is absolutely critical that that evidence and material is supplied so that a proper margins survey can be conducted into the costs and the profits, as by the direction of the courts.

### 5.15 pm

**Mr McCallister:** Minister, it is a little unfortunate that you are laying the blame with pharmacists, considering that your Department has lost two judicial reviews on this issue. The Minister had hinted at one time that he was considering whether to appeal the judicial review. Has he now ruled that out completely and could he give us a timeline for when he hopes the margins survey will be completed?

**Mr Poots:** First, the Department did not lose a judicial review on the basis of the drugs tariff. The drugs tariff stands, and that is a very important ruling by the courts. Where the Department did lose was in how it arrived at all of this. Of course, all of this happened before March 2011, and with the best will in the world, I do not think that Mr McCallister will want to hold me responsible for the activities in this Department before 2011.

**Mr McCallister:** You have had nine or 10 months to sort it out.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Poots:** Mr McCallister makes it very clear what the reasons are and who was responsible for it. We intend to move ahead straight away with the surveys. We intend to use the statutory powers that we have to ensure that we get the appropriate information, and, indeed, we intend to comply with what the court has instructed on that issue. We will be appealing, and we will announce that at the end of this week. I am surprised that Mr McCallister asked the question, because I said that in my statement.

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Minister for his statement but I fear that it will be greeted with disappointment and, indeed, anger by those in the community pharmacy sector and the wider community. To lose one judicial review can be regarded as a misfortune, but to lose two can only be regarded as carelessness. Now the Minister, who had said previously said that CPNI could not put up roadblocks to negotiation by lodging and coming through with a judicial review, may be in danger of being accused of putting up a roadblock —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Could the Member ask the question, please?

**Mr Durkan:** — to negotiation himself. Given that the Minister previously stated that CPNI may have been ill-advised and that the Department has now lost two judicial reviews, will the Minister accept that it may be he who is being ill-advised?

**Mr Poots:** The important issue here is the drugs tariff. The drugs tariff is what was being questioned, and the drugs tariff stands, so there is a basis for moving forward.

Therefore, Members should not get too hung up on some of these issues.

Looking to the future, it is important that we find a new way. It is wholly unfortunate that this megaphone diplomacy has happened and that we have engaged in the courts rather than engaging in negotiations. As Churchill said, jaw-jaw is better than war-war, and it would have been in everyone's interest for more negotiations to have taken place and to have had fewer battles in court. We would have found solutions at an earlier point, and where some pharmacists are genuinely suffering, perhaps they would be in a much better position today.

We have to move away from a situation where pharmacists are being rewarded almost exclusively for the dispensing of drugs. The work that they have provided in, for example, smoking cessation and a number of other areas will be expanded greatly over the next number of years. Those are the negotiations that we need to have and that will bring about sustainable pharmacies that can provide a far higher level of care for our community and, at the same time, ensure that people have a sustainable business model as opposed to fighting over drugs tariffs and other issues.

**Mr McCarthy:** The Minister is making me angry as we go along here. He acknowledged the horrendous testimonies that were presented to the Health Committee from pharmacies right across Northern Ireland very recently, and it was his Department, regardless of who was in charge, that took some £38 million out of the pharmacy budget in April 2011. That is exactly why we are getting the problem, and the pharmacies are now left demoralised and on their knees.

Throughout the past two judicial reviews, the departmental officials and the Minister refused to engage with Community Pharmacy NI or, indeed, this Assembly and hid behind the cloak of legal proceedings. The Community Pharmacy NI representatives are due to meet the Health Committee this week. Can the Minister confirm that that meeting will continue and that the timing of the appeal that he is now telling the Assembly will take place is not another cynical attempt to silence Community Pharmacy NI while pharmacies that are providing an excellent service in the community are closing?

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

**Mr Poots:** Yes, the meeting can certainly take place tomorrow, and discussions will take place on how future reimbursement of pharmacists can happen, irrespective of any appeal against the judicial review. I certainly was not hiding behind any cloak. I was following very clear legal advice, and it would have been foolish to do otherwise.

The Member talks about £38 million of cuts. Let me just run through the figures. Dispensing fees for 2010-11 were £41.9 million, and for 2011-12, £41.9 million. Professional allowance for 2010-11 was £9.6 million, and for 2011-12, £9.6 million. Other fees for 2010-11 were £9.5 million, and for 2011-12, £9.6 million. Minor ailments for 2010-11 were £3.5 million, and for 2011-12, £3.5 million. Pre-registration training was £3.6 million in 2010-11 and £3.9 million in 2011-12. Retained purchase profit in 2010-11 was £22.5 million, and that was reduced in 2011-12 to £16.5 million. So Mr McCarthy's figures are clearly wrong; £38 million was not taken out of the system. I see him shaking his head:

perhaps he can count better than I can. However, that falls considerably short of £38 million and is more around £6 million.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** An additional 11 Members have indicated that they wish to ask a question. I ask everyone to be as concise as possible in order that as many as possible can ask their question in the time available.

**Ms P Bradley:** I thank the Minister for what he has said thus far. Given what he has said, is there a suspicion that Community Pharmacy NI simply will not, or perhaps cannot, lend its name to any resolution of the impasse and is putting itself in the position of possibly resisting change?

**Mr Poots:** I trust that that is not the case, and I hope that we do not get bogged down exclusively on the issues of money, because wider opportunities exist for community pharmacists.

I value community pharmacists. They carry out a very important role and provide a front line level of care that is very readily accessible to the wider community. I would like to see that role expanded, and for the skill base that they have, I want them to have the opportunity to carry out a lot of the work that they have been educated to do. That is why I want to move away from continually arguing about drugs tariffs, and so forth, to identifying a business model that will support local pharmacies and provide an enhanced level of care to our communities. That should, in theory, help to avoid visits to GPs and to hospitals and, hopefully, reduce hospital admissions. That is the work that needs to be done, and that is the conversation that needs to be had. The focus of the argument was wrong in the first instance. I inherited the issue, but I trust that in due course, we will get to the point at which a long-term future for pharmacists is set out and that short-term issues will be dealt with.

**Mr Brady:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement, in which he said:

*"The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and HSCB have attempted to stretch as far as possible to reach an accommodation with CPNI in a very difficult context. I can advise that other proposals were made to CPNI. Indeed, I was willing to endorse an expanded package of measures that would have provided substantially more in facilitating cash flow and offering the opportunity to generate further income."*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** May we have a question, please?

**Mr Brady:** Why did that not happen?

**Mr Poots:** An offer was on the table that related to the work that would need to be done on the margins and cost surveys. That offer would have extended the funding profile and taken it closer to £100 million than to £90 million. However, pharmacists decided to reject that. For whatever reason, they did not want to accept the proposal on the cost and margins surveys that was being put to them, which was that they would carry out their survey independently, we would carry out our survey independently, using the same model and assessment tool, and we should have arrived at similar outcomes. For whatever reason, they do not want to do that. One must question what there is to hide. I suspect that it would suit many pharmacists to have those surveys conducted and that they have nothing to hide. Some of the bigger groups may not like it, and perhaps they are driving the issue.

**Mr Dunne:** I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he outline how the required cost and margins surveys will be carried out and what the time frame is? Is it the case that pharmacists are legally obliged to comply?

**Mr Poots:** For the margins survey, the discount survey first quarter analysis for 2011-12 should be available within the next six months. The cost survey is scheduled to report by June 2012, and the Department and the Health and Social Care Board will take forward the discount and cost surveys. It is the judge's direction that we have to conduct those surveys, so it is imperative that they happen. We will use statutory powers to ensure that they happen. We will not allow the situation to continue. It is not acceptable to withhold information so that we cannot make our decisions based on empirical evidence, as we would like to do.

If we were making our decisions based on that quality of evidence, we would be in a position to offer pharmacists sustainable remuneration. If that comes out at considerably higher than is currently on the table, we would have to find it in our health and social care system, which would involve cuts elsewhere. If it comes out with a figure that is closer to the one that we have produced, that is factual, and pharmacists can operate sustainably within it. However, we cannot elicit that information at this stage, but we intend to deal with the issue over the next few weeks.

**Mr Gardiner:** I join with other Members in thanking the Minister for his statement. I was greatly encouraged by his opening remarks, but somewhere along the route, his statement seemed to dip somewhat. Has the Minister considered differentiating between pharmacists' community activities and their normal activities? Will he consider funding their community activities separately?

### 5.30 pm

**Mr Poots:** The Member is quite right. In the negotiations that take place on the future of pharmacies, it is absolutely critical that we identify the community services that pharmacists can provide so that they can bring a skill set to the community in healthcare that can help us to implement 'Transforming Your Care'. I am very keen to provide them with fair reimbursement for doing so. That is certainly something that I want to negotiate and have talks about. I am very keen that that continues to be the case. I will ensure that my officials continue to engage with CPNI on that issue.

**Mr McMullan:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Like other Members, I am disappointed that this issue has not been resolved. Will the Minister tell me how much the judicial reviews have cost his Department? When we talk about pharmacies in rural areas and deprived areas, how will that be attained? Will we use the deprivation levels or how will the Minister go about deciding on the deprived areas?

**Mr Poots:** The deprived area definition certainly covered a lot of pharmacies; it covered 340, and there are only 520-odd pharmacies. A fairly wide tool was used. Rural areas were identified by pharmacies that were at least one kilometre from any other premises and dispensed fewer than 5,600 prescriptions a month. That is certainly something that would have helped around 73 pharmacists.

The judicial review cost around £153,000. That money would have been better spent on pharmacy itself. When I

came into office, had I had the opportunity to negotiate with pharmacists, I would have been very happy to do so, as opposed to spending money on lawyers.

Some of the rural pharmacies would have received upwards of £30,000 each as a result of what we were doing. Some Members sneer and deride additional moneys going to pharmacies. Many people would appreciate that level of support coming into their business at this time. It was a stop-gap measure until we negotiate a way forward for the future. That was something to help pharmacies through this year and through a difficulty that I inherited rather than created.

**Mr Byrne:** I thank the Minister for his statement. Does he accept that there are some single manager/owner shops in which between £500,000 and £1 million has been invested and that they are under real financial stress at the moment? Can he give some reassurance to those chemists that their plight will be understood? They will be concerned about the money that will be spent on a judicial review.

**Mr Poots:** Although I have a lot of sympathy for the individuals whom Mr Byrne may be talking to, obviously, people take a business decision. They make a business case and they move forward on that basis. It is not my responsibility to cover pharmacists who invested in property and the acquisition of the building, and so forth, during the property boom and for the repayments that they might have, and so forth. My job is to ensure that the pharmacy sector as a whole in Northern Ireland is properly and adequately reimbursed.

Members must remember that we are accountable to the public for our spending. The prescribing cost per head of population in Northern Ireland is £244.67; in Wales, it is £195.85; in Scotland, it is £192.25; and in England, it is £169.13. Wales is the best comparator because it has a rural/urban split that is not dissimilar to the circumstances in Northern Ireland. If Members think that we are providing good value for money in the current system and that, therefore, we can just throw more money at this issue, they should recoil from that position. It is not one that the House should adopt.

**Ms Lewis:** I thank the Minister for his statement and answers so far. There are pharmacists who indicate that there has been a substantial decrease in their funding from one year to the next. Will the Minister tell us what the figures from the Department indicate the change has been in annual recurrent funding for community pharmacies over recent years?

**Mr Poots:** I indicated that there was a £6 million difference in what was available at the outset of last year and this. It is important that pharmacists recognise that we have not made the £38 million cut. I do not know where Mr McCarthy or anyone else got that figure, but it is just not factual. There may be other reasons for pharmacists' incomes reducing, and they may have reduced by considerably more than £6 million. I am not in a position to dispute that at this point. However, we need to look at that and see what the reasons are, and look at the costs associated with running a pharmacy.

In 2005-06, a joint survey was carried out by the Department and the predecessor to CPNI — the Pharmaceutical Contractors' Committee (PCC). The cost survey that was agreed between the PCC — the representatives of the pharmacists — and the Department, just six years ago, was £65 million. The scheme today costs over £90 million. That is a substantial

rise that is well above the current rate of inflation, and we need to reflect on why the costs have increased so much. Therefore, we need to go back to the evidence base that I have talked about so much in order to establish the current, true costs of running a pharmacy.

**Mr Ross:** Can the Minister confirm whether the extra money offered, and that CPNI failed to approve, was of the same scale as the money that he announced today for rural and disadvantaged areas? Would that have brought the overall sum closer to £100 million, with an extra £8,000 for each pharmacy?

**Mr Poots:** It certainly would have come closer to £100 million and would have been a considerable boost to pharmacies. We have on the table today an average of an extra £16,000 for each pharmacist across Northern Ireland. What was on the table would have increased that substantially further and is closer to £100 million.

**Mr Elliott:** Obviously, any additional funding for pharmacies is welcome. He said that this funding would support new services. Given that the financial year ends in a couple of weeks, what new services can be put in place in that timescale?

**Mr Poots:** At the start of the year, £83.5 million was on the table. Services were to be carried out, but that will not now be available. We have offered compliance support in the amount of £2 million. We also offered rural support of £1.25 million. Deprived areas were offered £1.75 million, a lot of which can be spent on, for example, better security measures — it is important that, given what they deal in, pharmacists operate in a safe environment. A rural contingency fund, which I am sure that Mr Elliott will welcome, was to cost £1 million. Transitional support for contractual arrangements — to train staff, support premises, and so forth — was worth £2 million. That money did not have to be spent retrospectively. Pharmacists would have got that money this year and could spend it in the future.

**Ms Ritchie:** I thank the Minister for his statement. I have been presented by community pharmacists with schedules that show that variable amounts of funding have been reviewed annually over the past couple of years out of their schedule of moneys that should have been paid to them annually. However, a recent meeting of community pharmacists, with a turnout of 511 contractors, which represents about 96% of pharmacists in Northern Ireland, voted unanimously to reject the Department's offer, saying that it was not the issue of additional funding —

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

**Ms Ritchie:** Yes. Does the Minister agree that the offer does not address the difficulties of the community pharmacy sector and that the officials in his Department are out of touch with the needs of community pharmacists throughout Northern Ireland?

**Mr Poots:** It is easy for a politician to attack officials. As to reductions in funding, I do not have the figures for 2010-11 at hand, but in 2008-09, the cost of prescription drugs, for example, was £388 million, which went up to £404 million. The cost of remuneration, £53 million, went up to £55 million, and the total cost of pharmaceutical payments went up from £441 million to £459 million. So, I hear people talking about cuts, but we are looking at figures that are

increasing, for example, by £16 million for that year. That does not indicate to me that my officials are out of touch, but that, perhaps, some of the representatives in the Chamber are.

We need to ensure that pharmacists are given a reimbursement or remuneration that ensures that they can carry out a sustainable service within the community. I want the empirical evidence base to be able to do that. I am very willing to ensure that we get the funding package put together to do that. So, when the evidence comes forward, I will be very happy to move this forward and will do so.

**Mr Allister:** I must express considerable disappointment at the Minister's statement. On the one hand, I hear him affirm that he wants an early resolution, progress and the matter settled. On the other hand, he tells us that he is going to appeal the case that the Department lost on the regulation requirements. Thereby, of course, he adopts and endorses the stance of his predecessor, which got us to this point.

I bring him back to the very first question that he was asked. The £8 million was mentioned, but is it not the case that, for this financial year, the financial envelope that was agreed and decreed was £90 million? He had paid only £83.5 million, so of the £8 million that he will now pay, £6.5 million is money already promised and due. So, there is not £8 million of extra money; there is, at most, £1.5 million of extra money. Is that not factually correct?

**Mr Poots:** I will deal with two issues. One of the key reasons why the judicial review is being appealed is that the noble judge indicated that we should carry out a regulatory impact assessment. That has an impact on all the other Departments in Northern Ireland, as relevant decisions will all have to be subject to regulatory impact assessments. Colleagues in other Departments have their concerns that that will have a detrimental impact on the good and efficient working of government. Therefore, I am obliged to do this on behalf of others.

Mr Allister was patently wrong when he said that £90 million was on the table. That £90 million would have been on the table for a number of key services to be carried out. The baseline figure was £83.5 million, and there was £6.5 million for new services. Those services have not happened. If Mr Allister, for example, were to leave his vehicle into a garage but the work was not carried out on it, he would be unlikely to pay for it. So, we were only legally obliged to pay £83.5 million because that was the level of service that was supplied. Services that were to be supplied were not carried out. Therefore, the additional money is additional money because pharmacists are getting that over and above the service that was provided. It is £83.5 million plus another £8 million and, unfortunately, CPNI rejected a deal that would have taken the total, as I said, closer to £100 million.

**5.45 pm**

*Motion made:*

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]*

## Adjournment

### Ballycastle: Hotels

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The proposer of the motion shall have 15 minutes in which to speak. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who wish to speak will, on this occasion, have six minutes.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. A debate on hotels in Ballycastle is fitting given that this is being promoted as the year of tourism. A large part of that will be about promoting the north coast. We have had recent developments in respect of golf tourism, with the coming of the Irish Open to the Port and, most recently, the passing of the Runkerry application close to Bushmills. However, the lack of a hotel in Ballycastle or even the prospect of that by the end of 2012 would, indeed, put a dampener on all that.

We need a comprehensive tourism package right across the north coast. Ballycastle is a hub town. It is a gateway to Rathlin to the north; the Giant's Causeway, Carrick-a-Rede and the Port to the west; Armoy, the Dark Hedges and the Armoy races to the south; and to the east, the glens of Antrim. In putting a tourism package together, we also need to think of infrastructure. We need to think of the A26, and the proposed upgrading of the A26 to the Drones Road turn-off needs to be a priority in order to reduce journey times to Ballycastle.

There is huge potential that remains untapped. There is frustration as well, because it would be unthinkable not to have a large, quality hotel in similar hub towns in tourist hotspots in countries across the world. The Marine Hotel is, of course, in a great location on the seafront. It has 32 bedrooms, but there are fewer than 100 rooms in the Moyle District Council area and only 40 with 4-star provision, so there certainly is a deficit there.

A delegation of business representatives from Ballycastle and I met the Minister last year, and we found that quite helpful and positive, certainly with regard to the work that has been carried out since. The business community in Ballycastle and those involved in trying to develop hotels there also very much welcome the Runkerry application and recognise that there will be a positive knock-on effect for the town of Ballycastle.

However, there is concern that Runkerry being passed by the Planning Service may have an adverse impact on hotel applications in Ballycastle, even though in one case an application is much further down the pipeline than Runkerry. In response to a recent Assembly question, the Minister indicated that a promoter of a hotel seeking Invest NI support would need to demonstrate that the business would be clearly differentiated from existing and competing projects. The answer continued:

*"Projects that simply displace visitors from similar projects will not be considered. ... With reference to whether such an application would be affected by planning applications for hotels elsewhere in the Moyle council area it should be noted that any application is looked at on its own merits but an appraisal will take into account a range of factors when considering the future viability of the project."*

I do not think that hotel applications in Ballycastle will be affected by this, but the concern is there in the local community. It would be quite helpful if the Minister could allay that concern today.

I do not think that anyone wants to see a plethora of hotels on the north coast. What we do want to see is provision that is sustainable and will turn those single-day-trippers that we have had in north Antrim for so many years into overnight-stay tourists. That would increase revenues for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Ballycastle, create long-term tourism jobs throughout the area, and have the obvious multiplier effect with regard to other employment.

The application for a new hotel on the Whitepark Road has been passed for almost five years. Certainly, there is some opinion that that investment could have been secured many years ago if it had been passed quicker by the Planning Service. So, there is an issue about ensuring that we move quickly because when businesses declare an interest in developing hotels, they quickly move on elsewhere if they find that they are coming up against brick walls and doors are not being opened by government. We need to be wary about that in the months ahead.

We want to see the first sod being cut on this project in the next few months, and with a little support from Invest NI, we could see this project over the line. The money should be available for this development, especially since those behind the Runkerry development have indicated that they do not need any public funding for their proposal. The Whitepark Road project's costs are £10 million to £12 million. This significant investment will create 50 construction jobs for a year, along with 70 full-time and 35 part-time jobs for the local area thereafter.

The Marine Hotel is another source of frustration. Its sale has yet to be completed nearly a year and a half following the business going into administration. It lies at the very heart of Ballycastle, at the sea front. Some interest has been shown, and relayed to me, in trying to have the hotel reopened for this summer to offer rooms for the Irish Open and other events. There is no doubt that that is ambitious. However, it shows that people are willing to invest in the site to make it a success and part of this successful year for tourism.

However, it has also been relayed to me that Invest NI cannot help whoever takes over the hotel with refurbishments and in getting it operating for the summer if a purchase is completed shortly. So, it would be beneficial if the Minister will indicate whether her Department is in a position to offer immediate support post-purchase to get the venue reopened and operating by the summer, particularly as there are a number of major events in the area relating to golf and to the new Giant's Causeway visitor centre.

There are always rules and regulations that have to be adhered to in these cases. However, political will and a little flexibility are needed, in my opinion, to deliver on the tourism

targets that we talked about earlier today. Other jurisdictions can be flexible and can open the doors for the business community and show a positive approach. My concern is that if we do not take a more proactive approach with hotel development in Ballycastle, businesses will move on. It would be a great shame if business interests, particularly in the Marine Hotel, were to dissipate because processes were not moving quickly enough. That comment also refers to the delayed movement of the receivers.

I will conclude. There are concerns that opportunities will be missed in the coming weeks and months, and I will give the Minister an opportunity to speak about those concerns and see what can be done to ensure that opportunities for Ballycastle are grasped. It is clear that, with a bit of focus, hotel provision in Ballycastle can be secured. I have no doubt that securing it will lead to further provision being sought there in the years ahead and that Ballycastle, at long last, can realise its true potential. There is a view, with some justification, that Ballycastle has been neglected historically and that focus along the north coast has rarely strayed beyond the Giant's Causeway. That is regrettable, but we are moving forward with a positive attitude on the economy and tourism, and there is an opportunity to develop a new, more advanced tourism product for the north coast so that the entire north coast moves forward with vigour and success.

To make the north coast a success, Ballycastle needs to be at its heart. If any of the opportunities that I have outlined can be grasped, it will lead to greater things for the entire area. Therefore, I urge the Minister to ensure, as much as she can, that Invest NI invests in hotel provision in the town and secures some much needed employment and economic prosperity. The most pressing issue is time. If those opportunities are not grasped in the months and weeks before the summer, some interests will move on and Ballycastle will miss the boat again. I do not think that anybody in the Chamber wants to see that happen. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mr Storey:** I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. I can recall many happy days spent in Ballycastle. It was a time when my family went to Ballycastle on a Saturday to — as we would say — do the local groceries. The place was thriving; it had businesses and hotels, such as the Marine Hotel and the Antrim Arms, and it is not that many years ago that a family event was held in the Antrim Arms. However, there has been change in Ballycastle in recent years.

Although many of the concerns that the Member outlined hold some validity, it would be remiss of us to discountenance the excellent accommodation in the Moyle area, which is demonstrated by the 2011 accommodation guide issued by Moyle District Council. Many small businesses, such as bed and breakfasts, have an invaluable contribution to make to the tourist product. In fact, some of them have benefitted and grown by concentrating on a niche market and delivering a high-class, high-quality service. We need to pay tribute to those businesses. There is always a risk in these debates that we look only at the negatives, try to find somebody to blame and overlook a product that is already there.

We need to raise our disappointment that one development, namely the Marine Hotel, has, to date, been unable to find a purchaser and that the administrator has been unable to get the facility over the line. I also ask the House to consider that this is not a problem unique to Ballycastle.

Some years ago, a survey in Ballymoney, which is only a few miles from Ballycastle, found a huge accommodation deficit in the town. A number of generic concerns were raised in the survey that are also applicable to Ballycastle. Those who carried out the study said:

*“The policy context, however, in particular the priorities set out in the Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Masterplan for the development of the tourism product, is particularly supportive.”*

The Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Masterplan should be given the impetus and focus set out in the document. With the opening of the Causeway centre and the various elements of the master plan that have been delivered, we are beginning to see a context in which it is surely easier for a private developer to justify making the investment.

Just this week, I picked up that the average hotel room occupancy in December 2011 was some 47%, which represents a 5% increase on the rate published in December 2010. There is clearly a niche and a need. However, the Minister, the Department, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and everybody else needs to be conscious of displacement, which the Minister addressed in an answer to the Member some time ago.

There is also an onus on Moyle District Council. Regrettably, in the same week that this issue is being debated to try to promote Ballycastle and to paint its positives, Moyle District Council considered it more appropriate to pass a resolution linking Ballycastle with Gaza — not the football player but a geographical location.

If that council is really serious about promoting Ballycastle and about attracting people to what I believe is an invaluable asset on the north Antrim coast, a town that we ought to cherish and that ought to have an infrastructure that is welcoming and accommodating to visitors, as it has been in the past, it did not send out the right message this week. The Member who brought this issue to the House will need to tell some of his colleagues or even his former colleagues in Moyle that it is important that Ballycastle is promoted in a positive way that encourages people to come and stay in the town, rather than discouraging them by doing things that will not bring any added value to the tourism product on the north coast.

#### 6.00 pm

**Mr Swann:** I will not delay the House for long, because my party colleague Danny Kinahan is keen to get in and match Mr Storey with his childhood memories. When most North Antrim MLAs — or any MLAs — start to talk about the Causeway, the glens and Rathlin, they can paint a scenic picture of a fantastic tourist attraction. However, one thing that is missing is a niche hotel in the middle of the town. A number of my constituents from North Antrim got in contact with me to raise that exact point when they realised that this matter was being debated. However, I endorse some of the comments of Mr Storey in regard to the image and the message that the council portrays when it sends out those relationships. It is not just damaging to Ballycastle; it is damaging to the whole of north Antrim and to this Assembly when we send out those mixed messages. Individuals who try to do their best to promote Ballycastle and the north Antrim Causeway are not in any way being helped by the council doing that.

There are plans for two newbuild hotels in Ballycastle — one in Clare Park and the other in Straid Road, Moyarget. Therefore, there is an indication that the private sector is willing to support tourism potential there and to support another hotel. However, as has already been touched on, the major problem with hotel provision in Ballycastle is that the Marine Hotel occupies a prime, prominent location in the middle of the town on the seafront. However, it is lying empty and derelict, so it does not help to attract tourism potential. When we think of Ballycastle, we have a picturesque portrayal of the Ould Lammas Fair and the tourism potential that can come in there. As Mr Storey has already said, the administrators have had trouble selling the hotel. I welcome the opportunity for someone to open it for the summer to see if there is potential to move forward and to portray it. Members of Invest NI, the Tourist Board and Moyle council and its responsible members and officers could come together and enhance the Marine Hotel and reopen its doors, even for a short while.

My memories of the Marine Hotel may be somewhat different to those of other Members. The glens young farmers used the hotel to hold their club meetings because it was somewhere in the area that was non-denominational and could reach out to all sides of the community. That is why the Marine Hotel was vital to them. I was going to say, “On the other hand”, but that is not strictly true. I also have a friend from the GAA who said that there is a lack of provision now that the hotel has closed. It leaves the GAA with nowhere to hold its sporting dinners and all the rest of it. Another friend came to me and said that the hotel is a great loss to Ballycastle, as there is nowhere to hold funeral dinners any more. You can really portray three alternatives there.

One of the big problems about hotel provision in Ballycastle and the north Antrim coast is bed space. There is no hotel, including the Marine, big enough to hold coachloads of tourists. As was said earlier, if they come for a day trip, they could be enticed to stay overnight. We could get an extended stay out of them and get the overnight spend that is critical to Northern Ireland tourism at the moment. We have an opportunity to look to that niche market. We do not have to concentrate on four-star or five-star accommodation, which the Causeway Coast and glens tourism master plan portrayed in 2003 for 2013. There is provision for a budget hotel that can attract people as a stopover while they travel the entire north coast. What I say to the Minister — it has been portrayed here already — is that hotel provision in the Ballycastle area has to look to that niche market, and it need not be four-star or five-star accommodation. People can look to the budget end, which can cope with budget tourists. It must also be borne in mind that we should not take away from the local provision — the bed and breakfasts. They are the mainstay for a lot of rural families and families who work in agriculture up round there. Bed and breakfasts get that spend over the summer, which makes their businesses viable.

I am asking the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, who has a tourism role, to see how we can facilitate the local economy, the local council, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Invest NI in coming together, if there is a will for a private operator to move in, and to support and endorse them as much as we can. Earlier today, we talked about our economic strategy. Let us develop the entire tourist potential in the area, from the golfing potential to the Giant's

Causeway when the new visitor centre opens next year, and make the most of what we have to offer in north Antrim.

**Mr Frew:** I welcome the debate on hotel provision in Ballycastle and the surrounding area. My constituents have mentioned the issue to me over the past number of months, certainly since the Marine Hotel closed down. It is regrettable that Ballycastle does not have a major hotel within its limits, but, when you think about it, it is the day and age that we live in. It is about market forces and private finance, which has to be the driving force. Any project has to be viable, be a business, earn money and provide wealth. That is the problem for those of us in government. We can assist where we can. We can certainly try to smooth out the runway for businesses to take off, but that is basically all we can do. However, we can promote the area, be positive about it and enhance our towns and landscapes to attract more people. That would make hotel provision more viable and economical.

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

**Mr Frew:** I will, certainly.

**Mr Storey:** The Member who secured the debate referred to Runkerry. Surely that is an issue because it is an example of a private developer not asking for one penny from the public purse. He stuck it out for 10 years. There was delay after delay with planning and so on, but the developer saw the potential in the area and stayed with it. We need to ensure that we can encourage people — other private developers — to do the same in Ballycastle.

**Mr Frew:** I thank the Member for his intervention because he raises a valid and important point about our planning processes. When that man came with his plans initially, he was 10 years younger than he is now. That is a scary thought. It is good that he has persisted and stuck with his plan, which I hope will come to fruition. Not so long ago, a constituent complained to me that the application hurt Ballycastle with regard to hotel provision. I cannot agree with that. It will help to enhance the area and the town, which will benefit from the development and the people whom it will attract to the area.

We have to be careful that we do not think in small terms. The type of tourist whom we want to attract to Northern Ireland thinks nothing of a five- or 10-mile journey. Such tourists would be fit to travel for 50 or 100 miles without any problem, because they come from much larger areas and think in longer distances. We have to consider that.

Ballymoney is another example of a fine town that could do with more hotel provision, which would also enhance the north coast. I am aware that, over the years, hotels have gone out of business in the Coleraine, Portrush, Portstewart and Ballycastle areas, so there is a job to be done, and whether it will work depends on the economic climate.

A good point was raised about what the Marine Hotel meant to Ballycastle. The only thing that has not been mentioned is the fact that a 12 July parade is also held in Ballycastle. Again, hotel provision would be very much needed, wanted and used if available. It is important that all that is taken into account.

Ballycastle is no different from any other town at present. There are pressures on our town centres, retailers, cafes,

bars and restaurants. That is not unique to Ballycastle. Ballycastle is in a great position because it is located right up on the north coast. It can attract people who come to visit the strand, the beaches, the Portrushes and Portstewarts of this world and then want to travel round to the Causeway and the glens, and people travelling the other way, up through the glens. It is in a unique position and should be utilised more.

One thing I should mention before I come to the end of my time in this debate is the excellent provision, which my colleague Mervyn Storey raised, in the hotels, bed and breakfasts, guest houses and self-catering accommodation. There are over 650 bedrooms in Moyle. In Coleraine, there are over 1,500 bedrooms. The majority of those are, of course, self-catering and bed-and-breakfast establishments. That goes some way towards telling the story of the people we have been attracting to Northern Ireland and, in particular, to the north coast.

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

**Mr Frew:** I will. Thank you.

**Mr D McIlveen:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on this topic. The issue is very important, particularly to the people who live in the area. A couple of months back, I had two young ladies from one of the schools in Ballycastle with me on work experience. In the course of finding them something to do and keeping them interested, I asked them to go away and think of some questions that we could put to Ministers. The overriding issue that came up, time and time again, was tourism provision in Ballycastle. I do not think we can ignore the fact that this is an important issue for the people who live in the area. Certainly, the closure of the Marine Hotel was a body blow to the area. There is no doubt about that. For no other reason than the message that that closure sent out, it created a confidence blow, if nothing else.

This is an important issue. However, I agree with what my colleague Mr Frew said. This is largely down to private finance. We have to be wary, sometimes, I suppose, of establishing what we do and do not have control of in this Assembly. When it comes to banks and their ability to lend, that is something that does, unfortunately, rest with the banks. All that we can do is lobby and pressurise. Unfortunately, we cannot force their hand. My good friend and colleague Ian Paisley, MP for the area, has lobbied the banks extensively around this issue. There has been no lack of representation given to the people of the area to try to get this issue sorted out.

The Member for North Antrim who brought the proposal forward touched on one very important thing that I do not think any of us can take away from: the resilience of the people in this area. In the time that I have been working with the people of Ballycastle, particularly with businesses in the area, I have been hugely impressed by their resilience. I pay tribute to Mary O'Driscoll, who has just taken over the lead of the Chamber of Commerce. The drive is there to make Ballycastle bounce back from the blow it has had from the hotel closure. When I speak to business owners in Ballycastle, I hear that, although the hotel issue was a disappointment, it is not the biggest issue or biggest threat that they face at the minute.



The Minister is here, and I urge her to try to continue to pressurise the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to encourage the tourists who are coming over to Northern Ireland to see Ballycastle, Ballymoney, Ballymena and Bushmills not just as through towns on the way to the north coast, but to stop and get out and enjoy the local shops, cafes and restaurants. The provisions that we have in our towns and villages are exceptional in this area, particularly in Ballycastle.

### 6.15 pm

I pay tribute to Moyle District Council in some respects, although I share concerns about one of the points raised by Mr Storey, and I may come back to it if time permits. I agree with the assistance that Moyle District Council is giving to try to establish a new market in Ballycastle. Again, coming back to the resilience of the people, they are being creative and innovative. With the right support and help from the Assembly, the town will continue to flourish and do well.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board continues to give us statistics on how tourism is growing. We encourage that and are greatly appreciative of the work that it does. However, we want the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to encourage the buses to stop, because, until that happens, the people who work and have their businesses in those towns around the main attractions on the north coast will not see the full benefit of tourists coming in. I pay tribute to the council for the way in which it has tried to help to establish the market and, hopefully, give people more reasons to stop on their way through.

I believe that Moyle District Council is going down a very dangerous road and sending out a very negative message in what it is trying to pursue with the twinning project. We are not deviating off the point. We are looking at how we can encourage tourists to come into the area. Whether we like it or not, the reality is that, in the past 48 hours, 60 rockets have been fired from Gaza into Israel, one of which hit a school, which, only by the grace of God, was empty at the time. Is that really the type of place that we want to associate ourselves with? Do we really want to send out the message to potential tourists that those are the people and that is the place that we want to partner with? Moyle District Council has to be very careful. It has a responsibility to send out the right message. We will do our part, and we will support the people —

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

**Mr D McIlveen:** We will support the people who are working hard to try to promote North Antrim in a positive way. I will close with those remarks.

**Mr Allister:** We all share the frustration and disappointment that a beautiful setting such as Ballycastle does not have a hotel. Undoubtedly, a vibrant hotel is a hub and an attraction for any town of that size. However, we also have to be realistic and recognise that, no matter how generous grants or encouragements of one shape or another might be, at the end of the day, the defining issue for long-term sustainability of a business is that it is commercially viable. Although Ballycastle is in a beautiful setting, there must be reason why the Marine Hotel, in its prime location, was not capable of succeeding. Therefore, there is a certain naivety in thinking, "Government can fix this for us". Whatever the tourism Minister's powers and, indeed, her charms might be,

she cannot deliver commercial viability to a hotel if it is not sustainable.

**Mr Storey:** I thank the Member for giving way. Added to that, Moyle District Council has not provided extensive leisure facilities. That hotel was providing leisure facilities, but it was still unable to meet the criteria that the Member mentioned.

**Mr Allister:** That is really the same point. No matter how much we might flood the issue with goodwill or how much we might prime it with assistance, if that is possible, at the end of the day, it will either be commercially sustainable or it will not. Of course, we all hope that the exciting new developments on the north coast will float many boats, and that Ballycastle, too, will benefit from that; but we have to be realistic. The primary responsibility is on Moyle Council, which, contrary to what Mr McKay says, is very Ballycastle-centric. Its largesse is experienced much more in Ballycastle than it ever will be in Bushmills, and it is quite wrong to suggest otherwise.

Someone made an analogy about Gazza and football: there is a football analogy in that the council has scored a massive own goal with the preposterous decision that was made in the face of the advice that it was given and the knowledge that it was wholly divisive and would be prejudicial to the image of Ballycastle and of Moyle. Driven by the chairman no less, the council has insisted on a ludicrous twinning with Gaza. That insistence of twinning with the Hamas-led Gaza council, driven through by one community against the wishes of the other, has brought and will bring increasing opprobrium upon the council. That tells me that Moyle Council is sadly not motivated, as I would like it to be, by the overriding desire that could manifest itself in tourist and commercial success through a new hotel. It seems to have a different agenda, and last night's narrow decision was an indication of a very wrong-headed approach that does much damage.

Ballycastle's natural amenity is its beauty. My, oh my, when you drive down the hill into Ballycastle and look across to the headlands, it is magnificent; the beach is magnificent and you would wish to be there as often as possible. However, it is hard to take seriously a council that drives wedges into the community in this way instead of lobbying for and devoting its time and energies to things that matter. It is hard to take it seriously when that council says that the whole world is at fault, that it owes us an hotel that we do not have and never mind what we have done to drive tourists away.

The chairman of the council, who has driven this issue, needs to catch himself on. I am sure that such help as can be given will be given; however, at the end of the day, commercial success will determine whether Ballycastle needs a vibrant hotel.

**Mr Dallat:** Members may wonder why somebody from County Derry is taking part in this adjournment debate, but I remind them that Ballycastle is synonymous with the name Dallat. My eldest son was very fortunate to meet a Ballycastle girl, and he lives there. As grandparents, we look forward to visiting Ballycastle on a Sunday, and we have a closer-range experience of the town's uniqueness.

One thing that has always struck me about Ballycastle, having represented Coleraine for over 30 years where tourism is a big thing, is the absence of an hotel. Having

listened to the debate this evening, I will not get drawn into the quagmire of politics. We have been very critical of the media because of its negativity to the Assembly, but, my goodness, having heard some of the statements this evening, we do not need the media.

Of course, we welcome the proposed 120-bed hotel development at Whitepark. My party was very much involved in the creation of the Marine Hotel. I do not know the circumstances of why it is not functioning, but that is a matter of regret. Certainly, the SDLP was involved in promoting tourism in Ballycastle and elsewhere when it was fashionable for some to blow up hotels, but that is in the past.

We had some references to guest houses and so on, and they are, of course, the backbone. However, let us face it: any town of any significance needs a hotel for conferences and other activities. We heard that the Marine Hotel in Ballycastle was used by the Orange Order, the Young Farmers' Club and the GAA and for funeral dinners, and I have been to funeral dinners there. However, I know from my involvement in Coleraine that a million other things can happen in a hotel.

My colleague Councillor Donal Cunningham told me in an e-mail just this morning that the local economy needs people to stay overnight. That was the main problem we had in the Causeway in Coleraine as well: creating the incentive for people to spend bed nights in the hotel. So, there is no need to apologise for asking the Tourist Board, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment — I am delighted that the Minister is here — Invest Northern Ireland and any other relevant organisation to promote and help with the creation of the bed nights that are badly needed in Ballycastle, which, of course, is the gateway to the glens of Antrim.

There has been a lot of hype about the Irish Open coming here. I spent yesterday in Portrush and Portstewart with the Minister, who was doing her utmost to promote the area in order to ensure that that opportunity is not missed. There are several other new items on the tourist agenda this year such as the Titanic project, as well as the Milk Cup and the North West 200, the benefits of which spin out into Ballycastle and the surrounding areas. I know from experience that the North West 200 brings people back time and time again. Even during the worst of the Troubles, relationships were formed between people from here and people from England, Scotland and other places. So it is a serious business.

As I say, my heart is in the Sperrins, but I absolutely love the glens of Antrim. I will finish up by entertaining you with a little poem, 'The Nine Glens of Antrim':

*"There are nine Glens in Antrim,  
Nine great glens in all;  
Glenarm is the first one  
And near Cushendall  
There's lovely Glengariff, Glanaan and Glendun  
And nestling between them  
Glenballyemon, Glencorp and Glenshesk  
Come on, don't be lazy  
There's only Glencloy and the last one, Glentaisie."*

My colleagues from North Antrim, for goodness sake, put your full weight behind the issue, back it 100% and make it a success.

**Mr Kinahan:** I am incredibly pleased to be able to speak on what I regard as my second home. Following on from the comments of Mr Dallat, who mentioned so many of the things that draw everyone there, Ballycastle is the first place that I take people to see in Northern Ireland after they fly into the country. There, you have the beach at Fair Head, the glens that we just heard about and the golf course. Given all the changes that we are about to make along the north coast, let us make sure that we link them up with Ballycastle, and yet somehow find the right balance so that we do not destroy all that is Ballycastle and the surrounding area.

Like my parents, I have been going to Ballycastle from the age of seven, and I have an album full of photographs from the 1920s, when the town and hotel were thriving and bringing people in. I remember staying there as a child, and every single weekend, which seemed to start on Thursday and carry on to Monday, buses arrived on their tour around Ireland — I do not whether they were from Ulsterbus Tours — and people filled that hotel. That is what we have to see back in Ballycastle. We have to find the right balance, and I urge everyone to get involved in pushing for that.

I am up there in summer mainly for the tennis. Two years ago, for one week in August, there were 370 children playing.

If you go back through the history of tennis there, you will see that in 1936, according to 'The Coleraine Chronicle', 750 people played in the tennis tournament. There is a lot to go back to. It is a centre that we want to see everyone going to.

### 6.30 pm

Sometimes, we wait for tourism to come to us. Instead, we should look for reasons to go to a place. I have said that before. If you look at the other things that happen up there, you will see that the council has cleverly used the legend of the children of Lir and the link with Moyle. However, there is also the history of the Spanish galleons. Here we are, this year, celebrating the Titanic, but the Girona is wedged in up there. There is a mass of other little things that are buried around it. You have Dunseverick and Carrick-a-Rede. The easiest place to get to all of them from is Ballycastle. Therefore, let us look at that.

I ask the Minister and the council to push as hard as they can to get a working hotel back into that key slot in the middle of the town. I congratulate the council on many things that it has done up there. It keeps the area very clean and tidy during the tourist season. There is a lot of very good work. Yes, there are political points to score on it. However, it does good work in Ballycastle. I long to see the Marine Hotel working as part of the balance and Ballycastle thriving.

### **Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):**

I thank Mr McKay for tabling the Adjournment topic and allowing me to update the House on my Department's involvement in the development of tourism on the Causeway Coast and in Ballycastle in particular.

By now, everyone in the House should be aware that 2012 sees the start of what I truly believe will be the most important stage in the growth of tourism in Northern Ireland. The Department and NITB have been instrumental in delivering and, indeed, encouraging the delivery of a large number of projects and events that will allow us to market ourselves as the not-to-be-missed destination. It is also a

momentous year for the Causeway Coast and the glens. In June, we will welcome some of the world's top golfers — and, indeed, the top golfer — to the fantastic Royal Portrush links. The success of all of our golfers has done much to raise our profile. Hosting the Irish Open will afford us a major opportunity to take advantage of that. As Members know, we have spent a lot of time and effort promoting the Irish Open and the success of our golfers in order to get visitors to come here, particularly to the north coast.

Obviously, the Giant's Causeway visitor centre is due to open. Of course, it is situated in the district of Moyle. We are working hard to ensure that it will be open on time, ahead of schedule, and that we will be able to showcase it to the influx of visitors that we expect in Portrush for the Irish Open. We look forward to a lot of tourists coming into the area.

Mention has been made of the accommodation that we currently have in Moyle and Coleraine. I want to pay tribute to the many owners of guest houses and bed-and-breakfast facilities in and around the Causeway Coast and glens. A lot of them have a special relationship with the tourists who come to visit them year on year. I know that because, around two months ago, I had a very useful meeting with them to discuss their position on the tourism offering. I take up the point that has been made around the Chamber: those little accommodation providers are sustainable and are very much part of the offering along the coast and glens.

Despite what Mr McKay said, we have spent a lot of money in Ballycastle through infrastructural and interpretational enhancement at key sites, such as the seafront, the harbour, which, not long ago, the council invited me to visit, and, indeed, the ferry terminal. Great strides have been made around that area to lift it up with public sector works. Investment of over £300,000, of which £150,000 was funded by NITB, has been made to improve car parking, visitor access and landscaping. Two pieces of public art have also been installed on the Ballycastle seafront.

Although it is right that we recognise the efforts that have been made by government and its agents, we also know — it is a key point — that, if we are to achieve our ambitions for growth, it is essential that the private sector is encouraged and supported to deliver the infrastructure. I said “encouraged and supported”, and that is the key point. We want Ballycastle to have a hotel, and I told Mr McKay that when he visited me with some of his constituents. However, it has to start with the private sector, and we need to take full advantage of any private sector interests and work with them. When visitors come to Ballycastle and the Moyle area, we want them to have every opportunity to stay in the area and to spend money there. Therefore, as well as the need for accommodation, there is a need for restaurants, coffee shops, bars and things to see and do, and all of that is the role of the private sector. I have no doubt that, as Mr Allister said, where there is a commercial opportunity, the private sector will intervene and try to make it work.

It is obvious that a growth in tourist numbers will lead to an increase in the need for tourist accommodation. I have no doubt that there will be an increase in visitor numbers, and that is why NITB has commissioned Oxford Economics to model future tourism accommodation needs and to align those with future demand. Although that study has not yet been completed, it is reasonable to expect that it will

confirm the belief that there is a need for additional hotel capacity on the north coast.

I listened carefully to the debate and to Members' reminiscences of the Marine Hotel in Ballycastle. I did not know where some Members were going with those, but, on some occasions, I was glad that they stopped. Ballycastle certainly has a lot of character, and the independent retailers should be proud of the retail offering in the town. They have kept all the old shopfronts and it gives the place a great deal of character.

Mr McKay referred to the concerns that what was known as Runkerry but is now called the Bushmills Dunes resort will damage the prospects of other hotels attaining assistance from Invest Northern Ireland. However, the promoters of that hotel have publicly stated that they do not require any public funds, and its presence should not impact on other hotels that come forward for assistance. He also made the point about the need for the Marine Hotel to have assistance post purchase. I assure him that, if proposals are made by the purchasers of the Marine Hotel, INI will consider an application for refurbishment after the new owners are in place. That will obviously have to be within the current restrictions, but there is nothing to stop them looking at that proactively.

As far as I am concerned, Ballycastle is far from ignored. It has had a lot of public sector investment, and rightly so. As we have heard around the Chamber, it is a beautiful place. It is also the gateway to Rathlin Island, and Members have reflected on what it means to them. However, I would say to Members that Moyle District Council has an important role to play in sending out a positive message about the Ballycastle area. I question — that is all I will do — the sensitivity and sensibility of twinning Ballycastle with an area with great safety and security issues. As the Minister for tourism, I am trying, through NI 2012: Our Time, Our Place, to challenge many of the global perceptions of Northern Ireland. Therefore, I question whether twinning with Gaza would send out a positive message about Ballycastle and Northern Ireland. It runs contrary to what we are trying to do with those global perceptions.

Robin Swann indicated that he wants to see a hotel in the middle of the town. However, again it is down to the commercial viability of the private sector coming forward with proposals to Invest Northern Ireland. Invest NI knows that it is to be as proactive as it can with any proposals that come its way.

Mr Frew mentioned that the hotel needs to be viable. He talked about smoothing out the runway, and, at one stage, I thought that there was going to be a proposal for an airport in Moyle. However, thankfully, there was not. He went on to say that it is important not to think in parochial terms and talked about the many uses of the Marine Court hotel.

Mr McIlveen talked about the resilience of people in the area and made special mention of the chair of the Ballycastle Chamber of Commerce. He raised the issue of trying to get people to stop on the route of the Causeway Coast and glens, and I know that he has raised it directly with NITB in his role as chair of the all-party group on tourism. There are plenty of places to stop along the Causeway Coast and glens — hotels and other facilities — and that is a work in progress for him. Mr Allister mentioned the frustration of

not having a hotel in Ballycastle, but again, indicated that commercial viability was the key issue. It is my hope that, with tourism on the north coast rising to the top of the agenda, it will raise all boats and we will see a commercially viable hotel back in Ballycastle in the very near future.

Mr Dallat reflected on the importance of a local hotel and talked about the importance of events such as the North West 200 and how it impacts on the whole of the north coast. He also gave us a little poem about the nine glens of Antrim, so much so that I thought that we would have had someone singing 'The Ould Lammas Fair'. We did not, which was a bit disappointing. Perhaps not everyone knows the words. Mr Kinahan finished off the debate by saying that his family had been visiting the area since the 1920s and had played tennis and what have you. He wanted the council, the Tourist Board and others to work together to ensure that we had as positive an image of Ballycastle as we could. I entirely agree with him that that is what we want to do. We want to work together to ensure that we can do as much for Ballycastle as we can.

I am happy to reassure the House that I recognise Ballycastle and the Causeway Coast and glens as having a major part to play in the future success of tourism for the Northern Ireland economy. I look forward to continuing to work with colleagues in the North Antrim constituency to do just that.

*Adjourned at 6.42 pm.*

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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 20 March 2012

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Speaker's Business

### **Public Petition: Woodlands Speech and Language Centre**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Mr Pat Ramsey has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak about the petition.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Business Committee for allowing the petition to be discussed in today's plenary sitting. I have the pleasure of presenting this petition, which amounts to 20,000 names, from people right across the constituency and the north-west who are very concerned about the proposed closure of the Woodlands centre. It is a unique centre in the city. It is a speech, language and communications centre and a centre of excellence. A number of parents have travelled all the way here just for these five minutes, but they are an important five minutes in allowing them to make a contribution.

The Western Education and Library Board has stated that it proposes to close the Woodlands centre and to relocate the children to four primary schools across the city. I think that the Western Education and Library Board has lost sight of the real issue, which is to provide a specialist and unique centre of excellence in the city. The petition has been signed by parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts right across the spectrum of the city. As you know, Mr Speaker, you, Raymond McCartney, Mark Durkan and I have attended a series of meetings with parents who have seen their child progressing in the most positive way from when they had difficulties communicating at all to the stage where they can see progression. There is a concern that the move to the primary school sector would dilute completely the entirety of this good service.

I encourage parents, teachers, governors and those in the statutory sector, who, I may add, are not part of the formal consultation with the Western Education and Library Board, to participate and make their opinions known. This is a valuable asset in the unique Belmont setting, with the Playtrail and other elements that can assist the growth of a child.

I am pleased that all MLAs in the city have united behind this. We met the Minister of Education last week, and I am pleased to say that he is in listening mode. He has promised MLAs that, before and when he receives the submissions on the consultation, he will have another meeting to enable the parents, who are here today, to make a formal presentation to him.

It is a shame on the Western Education and Library Board that is using legislation from seven years ago now. Only because of pressure from parents has the board agreed to carry out a formal consultation. As a result of that formal consultation, over a few weeks, the parents from the Woodlands have collected 20,000 names. I commend and congratulate them. They are the champions not only of their own children but of the next generation of children. They see the importance of that. I present this petition, which is hugely important for them. Well done to all the parents involved.

*Mr P Ramsey moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.*

**Mr Speaker:** I will forward the petition to the Minister of Education and send a copy to the Chairperson of the Education Committee.

## Ministerial Statement

### British-Irish Council: Social Inclusion

**Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):** In compliance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following report on a British-Irish Council (BIC) social inclusion ministerial meeting, which was held in Cardiff on 7 March 2012. Martina Anderson MLA, junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, accompanied me at the meeting and has agreed that I may make this statement to the Assembly.

The British-Irish Council social inclusion group held its fifth ministerial meeting, hosted by the Welsh Government, at the City Hall in Cardiff. At the meeting, Ministers agreed the publication of a comprehensive report on the contribution of the third sector to social inclusion.

The meeting was chaired by Carl Sargeant AM, Minister for Local Government and Communities in the Welsh Government. The Scottish Government were represented by John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth. The British Government were represented by Helen Stephenson, director of the Office for Civil Society. The Irish Government were represented by Phil Hogan TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. The Isle of Man Government were represented by the honourable Chris Robertshaw MHK, Minister for Social Care. The States of Jersey were represented by Senator Paul Routier MBE, the Assistant Chief Minister, and the States of Guernsey were represented by Deputy Carol Steere.

Ministers discussed recent developments in promoting social inclusion across the eight BIC Administrations, focusing particularly on issues relating to the contribution of the voluntary and community sector. The value of that contribution is captured in the published report, which contains recommendations on how the third sector can make communities more sustainable and socially cohesive by working together; how we can enable wider civil activity; and how the third sector can become part of the mainstream in service delivery.

Ministers noted the key role of the third sector in delivering flexible and inclusive services in communities. They also acknowledged the work that is being done actively to engage the third sector from an early stage in policy discussions and development in each jurisdiction. Ministers commended the willingness and commitment of the third sector to support the resilience and sustainability of communities and the mobilising of voluntary effort to meet the big challenges facing people in their everyday life. Ministers thanked the third sector in each of the jurisdictions for their active engagement and valued contribution to the rich and shared learning that has emerged from the work of the British-Irish Council.

The work carried out by officials will continue to seek to strengthen and consolidate the ongoing co-operation and exchange of information, experience and best practice between member Administrations. Ministers considered priorities for future work themes and confirmed their interest in early preventative spend. While some advocated that the theme of early preventative spend has a particular focus in the context of an ageing population, others expressed the view that it should be more widely spread, in particular so as

not to exclude early years. Officials will prepare a paper for further discussion, and I will consult Executive colleagues on which Department might lead in the next phase of the work. All Ministers welcomed the publication of the report and noted that the next ministerial meeting will take place in Scotland on a date to be confirmed.

**Mr A Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development):** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

I thank the Minister for his statement, although I have to say that there is not really a lot of detail in the report. Given the focus on the community and voluntary sector and the substantial asset that that sector is for all of us, will the Minister elaborate a little on what discussion there may have been around the absolutely essential need to make sure that that sector is given adequate support to enable it to continue to be a key sector in our society?

**Mr McCausland:** All the contributors at the meeting acknowledged the importance of support for that sector, not just in terms of direct resources but in terms of good practice through early engagement with the sector, particularly in developing policy. There was a general acknowledgement that the engagement and the resources were important if the sector was to fulfil its potential in meeting the ongoing challenges. One of the things that was touched on was examples of good practice. Of all the areas that we talked about, Northern Ireland is certainly to the fore in the standard and quality of our involvement with the third sector.

**Ms P Bradley:** I thank the Minister for his statement. He talked about good practice. Are there specific examples in the report of good practice in the local voluntary and community sector?

**Mr McCausland:** There certainly are. I am greatly encouraged by the many positive illustrations of voluntary and community sector activity throughout the report. It is evident that the sector has a role to play in delivering services that reach into the very heart of our communities. The report contains specific references to two examples in Northern Ireland. One is the work of the Bryson Charitable Group in delivering innovative social enterprises for young people and the elderly and its wider community recycling programme. There is also a reference in the report to the Ashton Community Trust, which is in my constituency. It is promoted as a tangible example of community cohesiveness and sustainability. There are many other examples in the report of innovative, community-led action across the Administrations. I am particularly pleased to see that, across those, there was evidence of faith-based groups working to regenerate local communities through voluntary efforts.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I thank the Minister for his statement and his words since. He mentioned the Bryson Charitable Group, which is a very large organisation within the private sector, never mind the third sector. I took a briefing recently at which it was said that it had to complete 1,200 A4 pages as paperwork to get just a few dozen young people on to the Steps to Work programme. Does the Minister think that devolved government and its regulations are designed to help and facilitate the third sector to move forward?

**Mr McCausland:** The Member will be aware that the Steps to Work programme falls within the remit of another Department. Our engagement with the third sector is shaped by and based on the concordat between government and the voluntary sector.

One of the things being taken forward at the moment is that, in regard to the general work of the voluntary sector, through collaboration with NICVA, we are working to see what can be done to streamline and simplify the requirements that are placed on voluntary sector organisations in securing funding etc and in reporting on that. There is recognition of the need to do that. In fact, when I first took over in the Department, that was one of the things that was raised at the very first meeting that I had with NICVA and representatives of a wide range of voluntary organisations. At a meeting with NICVA, we talked about the challenges to the sector, and that was one of the things that was flagged up. They appreciated the ongoing work to simplify the process.

**10.45 am**

**Mr McDevitt:** It is disappointing to note that, although our Government, the Scots, the Welsh, the South of Ireland and the islands were all able to send Ministers to the meeting, it appears that the British Government were represented by a civil servant. Given that it was a meeting of the British-Irish Council social inclusion group, was there any discussion of the impact of the British Government's proposed welfare reform on the jurisdictions that will be directly affected by it?

**Mr McCausland:** That was not the subject of the meeting, but, obviously, it was in the background and in people's thoughts, particularly for areas that are directly affected by it. As the Member rightly indicated, quite a number of the jurisdictions, such as the islands, would not be directly affected. Likewise, the position in the Republic of Ireland is different. It was in the background, but it was not the subject of particular discussion at the meeting.

**Mrs Cochrane:** I thank the Minister for the statement, particularly the part about future discussions on early preventative spend. Has the Minister compared notes with other member Administrations? If so, what lessons can be learned for Northern Ireland, perhaps about what not to do going forward?

**Mr McCausland:** The focus was more on good practice than bad practice. We can always learn from mistakes, but you tend not to go to these meetings wanting to broadcast the mistakes. The focus was on good practice, which is why you will see in the report a number of good examples from Northern Ireland. I am not being presumptuous in saying that, if you look across the Administrations, you will see that the standard that Northern Ireland has reached in regard to the voluntary sector is well in advance of the standard reached by most of the others. Nevertheless, there are lessons to be learned. Some examples were given in the course of the discussion. The Welsh Minister made some interesting points about how the Welsh deal with neighbourhood renewal or their equivalent of our programme. There are certainly things that can be learned.

**Mr Easton:** I thank the Minister for his statement. What measures are the Executive taking to promote social inclusion?

**Mr McCausland:** The term "social exclusion" is used to describe what can happen when people are subject to the most severe problems. We deal with that generally through measures such as neighbourhood renewal and other interventions. Social exclusion certainly has to do with poverty and joblessness, but it is about more than that; it is about being cut off from the social and economic life of our community. The Executive are committed to

cutting away the roots of social exclusion and preventing the damage happening in the first place. The Lifetime Opportunities strategy describes how government will tackle the problems that reduce social inclusion and will work to prevent their recurrence. OFMDFM co-ordinates that work and monitors progress to identify gaps in provision and to propose initiatives that promote better joined-up working across Departments. Recent initiatives also include the social investment fund and the social protection fund. The development of a new childcare strategy, a disability strategy and an older persons strategy are imminent. All of those will contribute to improving social inclusion, where all citizens have an equal opportunity to participate in the social, political and economic life of the community.

**Mr Brady:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Welfare reform has already been alluded to, and you have answered that question. The voluntary sector here in the North has highlighted, vociferously in many cases, the inequities of the proposed welfare reform. Do you consider it suitable to discuss the resourcing of the voluntary sector and advice agencies in particular? They will bear the brunt of dealing with the most vulnerable in our society, who will be so adversely affected by the reform.

**Mr McCausland:** As the Member said, I have answered the basic question on the British-Irish Council meeting. His question strays into a slightly wider field, but we will deal a lot with welfare reform over the next 12 months. It will certainly be a challenge, and the voluntary sector has a significant role to play in providing advice and in the work programme, as a range of interventions relate directly or indirectly to welfare reform.

**Ms Brown:** I thank the Minister for his statement. How do his Department and the Executive demonstrate their commitment to supporting the work of the voluntary and community sector?

**Mr McCausland:** The new concordat between the Executive and the voluntary and community sector outlines a shared vision of working together as social partners to build a participative, peaceful, equitable and inclusive community in Northern Ireland. The document articulates shared values and principles that underpin relationships between government and the sector. There are 12 specific commitments, which will be key drivers for change and ensure the effective delivery of the concordat. As Social Development Minister, I am required to report annually to the Executive and Assembly on the concordat's implementation. The first report is due this summer.

The approximately 4,700 active voluntary and community organisations in Northern Ireland employ a paid workforce of almost 27,000. They are supported by a further 88,000 volunteers. A wide range of Departments, agencies and public bodies form working relations with and provide funding to those organisations. In the four years to March 2010, some 6,400 organisations received from public sector bodies 14,500 letters of offer totalling £1.3 billion. Of course, the voluntary and community sector, like other sectors, faces pressures in the current difficult financial climate, and we are striving to maintain vital front line services and minimise budget cuts to other services.

**Ms J McCann:** I, too, thank the Minister for his statement, which mentioned the early preventative spend. Does he agree that developing the social economy sector, which he also mentioned, may ensure that early preventative spend is delivered in a way that benefits communities and families?

**Mr McCausland:** The theme of early preventative spend was identified only at the most recent meeting. There will, as I said, be some discussion between the Administrations on the exact shape of the work to be undertaken. The exact form of such discussions has yet to be determined. However, it is generally recognised that social economy projects and initiatives will play an important role in the future sustainability of the voluntary and community sector and in delivering services.

**Mr McGlone:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí. The Minister referred to the discussions about good practice, and I listened carefully to Mr Brady talking about what he referred to as welfare reform. My question concerns advice provision and what lessons can be learned from other jurisdictions. That is particularly the case as we move to a new era, in which many people are loosely referred to as “the new poor”. They are out of work or face reduced hours for the first time. Specifically on welfare reform, I notice that ‘The Guardian’ today reports a massive increase —

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

**Mr McGlone:** — in the number of people going to tribunal because they lost out in the transition from incapacity benefit to ESA. What has been learned, or what potential is there for improving good practice in targeting advice at people who find themselves facing those dilemmas?

**Mr McCausland:** The work of the BIC on social inclusion has been ongoing for the past 18 months or so. As I said, welfare reform did not feature particularly. It was in the background and part of the context but not a feature of the discussions. However, it shapes the understanding and approach of particular Administrations.

The area that the Member moves into — advice-giving in relation to welfare reform — is not, I suggest, something that arose particularly in this area but will be very much on the agenda of the Assembly over the next year. As we move forward with welfare reform, it is important that we get good, sound, accurate advice to those in need of it, so that the potential detrimental effects of welfare reform in some areas are mitigated as far as is possible.

**Mr Douglas:** I thank the Minister for his statement and answers so far. Will he outline the benefits to Northern Ireland arising from the BIC ministerial meeting?

**Mr McCausland:** I welcome the publication of the report and the work that officials, including our own officials, have taken forward in this regard. The full report is available on the BIC website.

The work of the BIC provides real opportunities for learning and sharing best practice across the Administrations, all of which have different situations and problems. They have certain things in common, but there are significant differences too.

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

The report that was launched was the result of 18 months of active engagement with voluntary community organisations across the islands, and it sets out real challenges for us. A number of the recommendations are included in the Executive’s new Programme for Government. They include investing in social enterprise growth to increase sustainability in the broad community sector; developing and implementing a policy framework on community asset transfer; providing resources to address dereliction and grow investment in the physical regeneration of deprived areas; and including social clauses in public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction. Those four areas are included in the new Programme for Government for Northern Ireland, and they are also recommendations found in the BIC social inclusion report.

**Mr Allister:** What does it say to the Minister and what should it say to this House and the other participants that every Government except the United Kingdom Government sent a Minister to the discussions? What does that say about the status of the east-west relationship? Could the Minister ever imagine mere civil servant representation being thought to be enough in the North/South set-up?

**Mr McCausland:** I am sure that the Member will appreciate that there are times for all of us when circumstance or sickness prevents us attending something. This is the first meeting of the BIC that I have attended where that has happened. It is the first. However, I think that all of us would acknowledge, if we are honest about it, that there are times when, even in the most pressing circumstances, an appointment or engagement is one that we have to forgo. The commitment of the UK Government to the BIC is well reflected in the strong representation that there is at BIC meetings on a regular and ongoing basis, meeting after meeting. This was a rare exception.



## Executive Committee Business

### **Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I beg to move

*That the draft Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.*

The aforementioned statutory rule will, subject to the Assembly's approval, introduce new provisions on permitted procedures that may be carried out on animals by a lay person. The regulations revoke the Welfare of Livestock (Prohibited Operations) (Amendment) Regulations 1987, which were made under the Welfare of Animals Act 1972.

I will now explain briefly to Members the background to the regulations. The new Welfare of Animals Act 2011, which the Assembly passed last year, contains powers, at section 5, to make it an offence for a person to carry out or cause to be carried out a prohibited procedure on a protected animal.

#### **11.00 am**

A prohibited procedure is defined as one that involves interference with the sensitive tissues or bone structure of the animal. The 2011 Act also contains an exemption where any procedure is carried out by a veterinary surgeon for the diagnosis of disease, for the purposes of medical treatment of an animal and any other procedure specified in regulations made by the Department.

Before I commence the powers in section 5 of the Act, to ensure that acceptable procedures such as inserting an ear tag in a cow or a microchip in a dog, which are commonly undertaken by farmers, pet owners etc, remain legal, my Department must set out in these regulations all the procedures that a lay person who is a non-veterinarian will be allowed to undertake. The new regulations will, for the first time, provide clarity by listing all those procedures. The regulations do not include the docking of dogs' tails, as section 5 of the 2011 Act does not cover that.

The regulations contain a general requirement that all permitted procedures be performed in accordance with any relevant requirement listed in the schedules to the regulations, in such a way as to minimise the pain and suffering that it causes to the animal, in hygienic conditions, and in accordance with best practice. Lay persons undertaking those procedures must have received instruction or have experience in a procedure to the full requirement in the regulations.

A 12-week public consultation was undertaken with stakeholders from 1 July 2011 to 23 September 2011, to which there were 25 responses. Overall, the regulations were welcomed by all stakeholders, and there was significant support for the vast majority of the proposals in them. The consultation proposed that all procedures that had historically been allowed to be carried out by lay persons should continue to be allowed, with the exception of the hot branding of horses. The proposal to ban the hot branding of

horses was welcomed and supported by all respondents to the consultation.

The responses to the consultation led to a review of the policy in relation to some outdated methods of identification, now that microchipping is widely accepted as a reliable method of identification. Therefore, the ear clipping of any species, the ear notching of pigs and the tagging of cats and dogs have been removed from the draft regulations and will be banned. In addition, since the consultation, the implantation of a subcutaneous hormone has been added to the list of permitted procedures for sheep.

I am pleased to say that when the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee considered the regulations on 15 November 2011, and again last week on 13 March, it indicated that it was content for the regulations to be brought before the Assembly. I am grateful to the Chair and members of the Committee for their support for the regulations. I commend the motion to the House.

**Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development):** I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion, which seeks to affirm the Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, passed by the previous Assembly, makes it an offence to carry out a prohibited procedure on a protected animal. A prohibited procedure involves interference with the sensitive tissues or bone structure of an animal. To ensure that the acceptable procedures commonly undertaken by lay persons such as farmers and pet owners remain legal, the regulations set out all the procedures that may be carried out by a lay person. The regulations will provide clarity by listing all those procedures that are acceptable for a lay person to perform; they will also provide clarity around the definition of a lay person.

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development considered the proposal as an SL1 on 15 November 2011 and indicated that it was content with its policy merits. The Committee further considered the statutory rule on 13 March 2012 and resolved that it be affirmed. I can confirm that the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development is content with the statutory rule and that it be affirmed by the Assembly.

**Mrs Dobson:** The regulations set out the acceptable practices that may be performed on animals by non-veterinarians. The Welfare of Animals Act of last year was a welcome piece of legislation. Although I was not a Member of the House at the time, I know that it was debated at great length.

However, it is important that legislation, no matter how well intended or well drafted, does not have a counterproductive effect on the animals or industry that it is supposed to protect. Therefore, I welcome the regulations, as they clearly lay out the so-called permitted procedures. As any farmer will tell you, clear lines of identification are now embedded throughout the industry. Therefore, it makes sense that actions such as ear tagging are exempt from the Welfare of Animals Act.

Other common-sense procedures, such as allowing farmers to continue to castrate young male animals, are also exempt from the Act. It was already common practice before the Act came into force for any procedures that were carried out on

a sensitive area of bone and skin to be done in a way that ensured minimal pain or suffering to the animals.

The regulations permit the continued routine of farmers seeing to their own animals and therefore allowing them to avoid the tremendous cost of having to bring in a vet every time an animal loses a tag. Living on a farm, I see how often that happens. It is not in the interests of farmers or any other animal owners to put their animals through unnecessary pain. However, it unfortunately happens on a small number of occasions. I am confident that the regulations will go some way to further preventing such instances.

Today's provisions were broadly welcomed by the industry and my party. It is now up to the Department to ensure that they are properly enforced.

**Mr McCarthy:** On behalf of the Alliance Party, I offer my support for the draft Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

**Mrs O'Neill:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank all Members who spoke for their contributions to the debate. I am pleased to note the support for the introduction of the Welfare of Animals Regulations 2012.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the draft Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.*

## **Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development):** I beg to move

*That the draft Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.*

Go raibh maith agat, LeasCheann Comhairle. I seek to introduce the statutory rule, which, subject to the Assembly's approval, will replace the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2000. I will explain briefly to Members the background to the regulations.

Following the introduction of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 on 29 March last year, it has been necessary to consolidate and remake the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2000. Those regulations were made under the Welfare of Animals Act 1972, which is in the process of being repealed.

The statutory rule lays down rules for protecting the welfare of farmed animals, and it imposes a duty of care on the person responsible for the animal. The rule also provides for general conditions under which farmed animals shall be kept and additional conditions for some farmed species, namely, laying hens, broilers, cattle, pigs, rabbits and calves confined for rearing and fattening.

As I said, the statutory rule will consolidate and remake the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2000, which were the result of several EU directives being transposed into local legislation. There are no significant changes to the 2000 regulations other than the removal of the provisions that are already in the Welfare of Animals Act 2011. Those provisions relate to the powers of an authorised officer, powers of entry, improvement notices and the issue of statutory welfare codes.

Members may also wish to note that mutilations or interventions have been removed from the welfare of farmed animals legislation, as they are now covered under the Welfare of Animals Regulations 2012, which the Assembly has just approved.

A 12-week public consultation with stakeholders on the draft Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2012 was carried out between 4 July and 26 September. There were five responses to the consultation. The majority of respondents had no comments or views. Three stakeholders expressed views on the powers of seizure. Those powers were not part of the consultation exercise, as they are direct powers from the Welfare of Animals Act 2011. My officials responded to the three organisations separately.

I am pleased to say that, when the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee considered the regulations on 24 January and 28 February, it indicated that it was content for the regulations to be brought before the Assembly. I am grateful to the Chair and members of the Committee for their support of the regulations.

I commend the motion to the House.

**Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development):** Again, as Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, I welcome

the opportunity to speak in the debate on the motion, which seeks to affirm the draft Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. The Minister has outlined the provisions of that legislation, so there is no need for me to repeat them.

The current Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, as amended, were made under the powers of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972. Following the introduction of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 on 29 March 2011, these regulations are in the process of being repealed.

What the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is doing here is fulfilling its statutory obligation by repealing and remaking, while at the same time consolidating, the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 as amended. The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development considered this proposal on 24 January and indicated that it was content with its policy merits. The Committee further considered the statutory rule on 28 February and resolved that it be affirmed. I can confirm that the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development is content that the statutory rule be affirmed by the Assembly.

**Mrs Dobson:** Last year's Welfare of Animals Act brought together legislation relating to the welfare of farmed and unfarmed animals and substantially enhanced the 1972 Act. It is important that any regulations that we pass today do not impose any additional burdens on keepers. In fairness to the Department, I do not believe that they will. Rather, today's regulations are a natural progression in revoking and remaking provision that was made under the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000. Therefore, there is little new here today. The regulations made 12 years ago already detail the general conditions under which farmed animals can be kept, and they contain schedules setting out additional conditions applying to various species of farmed animals.

Given that the schedule to today's statutory rule includes conditions that apply to the keeping of laying hens in different systems, it would be remiss of me not to mention the 2012 welfare of laying hens directive. You may recall that I brought the issue to the House a number of months ago and highlighted certain member states' woeful attitude. Even now, three months after its implementation date, some of Europe's largest egg producers seem blissfully negligent of the conditions of the directive.

Importantly, the 2011 Act also expanded the enforcement roles of DARD and council inspectors. Under the 1972 Act, these powers extended only to the police. My party had significant concerns about the new proposals, particularly in relation to significant responsibilities being passed to local councils without enough resources to match. Another significant amendment was that, where the inspector finds a farm animal that is likely to suffer, the inspector can now act immediately. While these proposals should be welcomed, they also mean that much greater responsibility and power will be placed in the hands of DARD inspectors. Therefore, I strongly believe that inspectors should be trained to a veterinary standard while being fully up to speed on all animal welfare regulation.

I use this opportunity to say once again that seizure must be the last resort in all cases. Farm animals falling into poor condition is not always down to complete disregard on the owner's part. Sometimes farmers, through no fault of their own, perhaps because of poor physical or mental health, can neglect the care of their livestock. The Department must recognise that entering a farm and removing animals has the potential to greatly exacerbate the situation of, for example, a farmer who is experiencing mental health difficulties. Today's statutory rule is a welcome progression of last year's Bill. However, my party had concerns then and still has some of those concerns now.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I welcome the statutory rule and the improvements in the health of farmed animals. It informs consumer choice, and the agrifood industry can market abroad how animals are farmed here. I support the regulations on behalf of our party but back Mrs Dobson's call for proper, full and adequate training for inspectors on the farm.

**Mr McCarthy:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Again, on behalf of the Alliance Party, I support the draft Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 and concur with the Committee Chair.

**11.15 am**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank all Members who contributed to the debate. I will pick up on a few points, particularly those about laying hens. The Member will be aware that the island of Ireland is now fully compliant, as is Britain. We explored the issue of a unilateral trade ban, and the Member will recall that, in December, I said that I was seeking legal advice. We still await that advice and will continue to pursue it to make sure that we are looking after our local egg producers.

There will always be a reasonable and practical approach taken to the seizure of animals. It is all about the welfare of animals. Basically, the regulations that we are discussing today tidy up the existing legislation. There will always be a pragmatic approach to seizures, but the welfare of the animal has to be key. There are also clear routes for farmers to appeal decisions, and that will be made clear to everybody who wants to go down those routes.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the draft Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.*

## Committee Business

### In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) Treatment

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

**Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** I beg to move

*That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to fund three full cycles of IVF treatment, including the subsequent transfer of any viable frozen embryos, as recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE); and further calls on the Minister to undertake a review of fertility services based on the updated NICE guideline on the assessment and treatment of people with fertility problems, which is due to be published in July 2012.*

It is probably an opportune time to take a cheap political shot, but I will not, because I know that the Minister is interested in the issue, and this item of business has started earlier than expected, so I assume that he is on his way. For the record, I hope that he takes the time to look at Hansard, and I am sure that his officials are looking at the issue, too.

I welcome the opportunity to bring the motion to the House on behalf of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Approximately one in seven couples will be affected by fertility problems. Therefore, it is a significant and fairly common problem for a lot of people. We probably all know at least one couple who have had difficulty conceiving a child and opted to use IVF. We all know the great joy that comes about when IVF is successful and couples finally feel that their family is complete.

I will start by providing a brief history of fertility services here. Many Members will be familiar with the issues, as we debated the matter in the previous mandate, but I am conscious that there are a lot of new Members here today. The regional fertility centre in Belfast was founded in 1987, but, initially, provided services only to private patients. It was not until 2001 that we finally began to provide fertility treatment to health service patients. That decision was made by the then Health Minister, Bairbre de Brún, and it was a significant step forward, as, before 2001, anyone who wanted to access fertility treatment had to pay for it.

At the same time as launching the service, Bairbre de Brún initiated a public debate about the future of a publicly funded fertility service, and a public consultation was launched in 2003. During the consultation period, the fertility service was available on a limited basis to couples without children who satisfied a number of criteria, including a maximum age of 37 for women.

Following the public consultation, new arrangements were announced in 2006. A number of changes were introduced, including changes to the eligibility criteria. Those welcome changes included raising the maximum age limit for women

from 37 to 39, improved counselling services and permitting couples with children to access the service.

Following a year of operation under the 2006 criteria, the health boards reviewed the situation. The evaluation highlighted the increasing demand for treatment, as more people were now eligible. Unfortunately, the demand exceeded the available resources, and it was shown that waiting times had seriously increased.

An Assembly motion was brought in October 2007, which called on the Department to conduct a review of fertility services, including the access criteria, the waiting list problem and the number of IVF treatments that would be available to couples. The motion was passed by the House, and, subsequently, the Department carried out a review. In October 2008, the then Health Minister, Michael McGimpsey, announced the outcome of the review. One of the key changes was the creation of a regional waiting list, which was welcomed by all. Previously, each health board had its own list, which had created a bit of a postcode lottery. The Minister also put in an additional £800,000 to get the waiting list down, with the expectation that, in future, the waiting time would be reduced to a maximum of 12 months.

That is a brief history of how we have got to where we are today. While I think everyone will agree that we have made good progress over the past 10 years, the bottom line is that we are still not meeting the NICE guidance on the provision of fertility treatment. The NICE guidance, which has been in operation since 2004, clearly states that a woman should be offered up to three cycles of IVF. At this stage, I will take the opportunity to clarify what is meant by three cycles. According to the NICE guidelines, a cycle of treatment begins with stimulation of the ovaries and the collection of eggs and sperm, and the transfer of one or two resultant embryos back into the womb. If other embryos are successfully produced at the time, they are frozen. They are then implanted into the womb, if the initial embryo did not result in a pregnancy. One cycle of treatment includes the transfer of the initial embryo and a transfer of any frozen embryos, if required.

NICE recommends three full cycles of IVF. It does that for very good clinical reasons. Unfortunately, IVF is not always successful first time round. The success rates vary with the age of the woman. For women aged 23 to 35, there is a 20% success rate after one cycle of IVF treatment. That means that 80% will not get pregnant after one cycle. We can clearly see by the statistics why, in most cases, one cycle of treatment is not going to be enough. That is why NICE recommends three cycles.

We must also remember that NICE does not operate in a vacuum. It makes recommendations not only based on the effectiveness of a drug or treatment, but takes into account its price and the impact on the health service of funding it. NICE is aware of the cost of fertility treatment and has judged that three cycles is the best way of achieving a fair balance between the needs of couples and the limits that will have to be placed on funding. Therefore, in my view, we should be providing the three full cycles; providing one is not good enough. For many people, the first time round is not successful, and their only chance to try again is to go privately. Going privately will cost people in and around £4,000. If it does not work, and they try a third cycle, it is another £4,000. In total, couples could find themselves in

debt of around £8,000. At such an emotional time, when couples are trying for a baby, that can create more stress.

It could be said that the Department seems to be choosing to ignore NICE guidelines when it suits. We cannot treat IVF as a service on which the Department can simply use its discretion. It has been approved by NICE and, therefore, should be provided.

The health service should not always be about disease prevention; it should be about positive outcomes in health. Having children has many positive benefits for the parents and the wider family circle, who are much better off as a result.

If we look at what is happening in other places, we will find that 27% of primary care trusts in England are providing three cycles of IVF and 26% are offering two cycles. In Scotland, three cycles are provided, and two cycles are provided in Wales. My point is that it can be done there, when there is the will to provide the three cycles and follow the NICE guidelines. Why are we not looking to do it?

There is another issue that also needs to be urgently addressed. The Department frequently refers to providing one cycle of IVF. However, at the moment, the health service is providing only one fresh cycle of treatment. Any frozen embryos are not transferred. What happens in practice here is that couples go for health service treatment and receive one fresh cycle of IVF. If that cycle does not result in a pregnancy, that is all the treatment that is available to them. However, around half of couples will have generated frozen embryos. They are then left with a very difficult decision. The only way that they can use those frozen embryos is to pay to have them transferred, which costs around £1,500. In my view, we are on tricky moral ground here. The health service is creating embryos for people as part of the publicly funded treatment, but, in the case of any frozen embryos being available, we are allowing those to be transferred only in the private sector.

In January, in response to an Assembly question, the Minister stated that he would like to move to providing a frozen embryo treatment once the waiting list is stabilised. That is to be welcomed. However, that was the same answer provided by the previous Minister a year ago. I am worried that there does not seem to have been much real progress on the issue, and will be interested to hear what the Minister has to say later in the debate.

In the short term, we want to see frozen embryo transfer (FET) introduced in the health service. The Infertility Network, which has been campaigning for years on this issue, has calculated that that would cost only £250,000 per annum. Given that the Department has a budget of £4.3 million, surely the money can be found somewhere.

The last point I would like to make is that NICE is currently in the process of updating its 2004 guidance on the assessment and treatment of people with fertility problems. The updated guidelines are expected to be published in the summer of 2012. The new guidelines are to be welcomed, given that there have been significant developments —

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

**Ms S Ramsey:** — in infertility practice and techniques since the original guidelines were published. The last time that the Department reviewed fertility services was in 2007. We are five years on, and I think that it is a good time for the

Minister to look again at the issue, once the guidelines have been published. I welcome his views on this matter.

In finishing, Mr Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the Infertility Network for all the work that it has done in supporting the Committee in bringing forward this motion.

**Mr Dunne:** I welcome the opportunity to speak as a member of the Health Committee on what is an important issue for many families in Northern Ireland today. This is a very sensitive matter, and one that needs careful consideration.

There have been many advances in recent years in improving and developing fertility services. That is particularly welcome. However, as with many areas in our health service provision, more could still be done to further improve accessibility in this particular field.

Infertility is a very distressing and sensitive condition. Unfortunately, it continues to affect many people across the United Kingdom. It is said that about one in six people, male and female, suffer from fertility problems of some kind. That highlights the importance of the issue for people here. We need to continue to develop and support methods aimed at helping those who find themselves in this situation.

Given the very sensitive nature of the issue, it is vital that we avoid the postcode lottery that previously existed, and which still continues in England. To date, there has been investment and progress on improving access to fertility services. That is to be welcomed. The 2006 announcement that saw all qualifying couples entitled to one full publicly funded cycle of IVF treatment, while also increasing the maximum age limit for women accessing the service from 37 to 39, was a positive step forward in improving and widening fertility provision. The extension of the upper age limit helped alleviate the problem of women suffering the heartbreaking scenario of narrowly missing out, by a number of months, on publicly funded IVF treatment.

Counselling plays a crucial role in fertility treatment. It should continue to be prioritised to support couples through the traumatic fertility processes, given the very low success rate — approximately 20% — of IVF treatment based on embryo transfer.

Unfortunately, even with a successful embryo transfer into the womb, the four out of five chance of an unborn child dying can often be just too great a burden for many couples to bear. Given the unimaginable stress that would exist in those scenarios, it is vital that an adequate support infrastructure is put in place to assist those most in need.

### 11.30 am

We need also remember the very important issue of the sanctity of life and ensure that that is always to the fore when dealing with this very sensitive fertility issue. The practice of freezing and then destroying embryos is particularly questionable and has resulted in many embryonic children not having the chance of life. As reported in newspapers, the IVF lottery competition that launched in the middle of last year, which gave contestants a chance to ultimately win a baby for £20, is a shocking example of how such a sensitive issue can be commercially hijacked by those selling precious human life. Human life should never be treated as a commodity; rather, it should be preserved and cherished in the dignified way that it deserves.

I welcome the Minister's commitment and aspiration to see Northern Ireland widening its fertility services and I urge him to consider extending the service, without narrowing the accessibility criteria as that would result in fewer couples receiving any publicly funded treatment.

**Mr Gardiner:** During Question Time in September 2011, my colleague the Member for Mid Ulster asked a question about DuoFertility, which is a system based on detecting high fertility cycles in the human body. It was developed by Cambridge Temperature Concepts and was outlined on the Cabinet Office website in May 2011. It has been scientifically shown to achieve the same pregnancy rate as a cycle of IVF in the same patient population at a cost of £500, compared with a typical NHS cost of £4,000 per cycle. At the time, although admitting that what Mrs Overend said was interesting, the Minister said that Northern Ireland normally operates under the protocol of NICE guidelines. He said that if the system that Mrs Overend referred to was as good as she had indicated, he trusted that NICE would recommend it to us. He also said that it would certainly alleviate our problems, which are largely financial. Has the Minister been able to investigate that matter since Question Time last September?

I believe that I am right in saying that the only restraint in providing the three cycles is financial. That being so, will the Minister indicate where the provision of the three cycles of IVF treatment is on his departmental wish list? Are there many items ahead of it in that queue for finances?

**Mr McDevitt:** I am very happy to participate in the debate and to support the Health Committee's call for three cycles of IVF treatment. Colleagues who have been here longer than I have will know that the issue has exercised the House for almost a decade. In my opinion, it goes to the heart of our equality legislation, as it affects couples who are seeking to become parents and are being discriminated against in this region relative to other parts of the United Kingdom.

It is worth noting that in 2004, NICE produced the clinical guidelines 'Fertility: assessment and treatment for people with fertility problems', which suggested a number of criteria for the provision of IVF treatment for infertile couples. The criteria suggested in the guidelines had been adopted across the UK to varying degrees, and I suppose that the point of the debate today is to find the degree to which this region is willing to accept a guideline that clearly recommends that three cycles of IVF treatment be made available to infertile couples.

There is an opportunity for the Minister to respond to this debate, not in financial terms but in social and human terms, and to signal that, irrespective of the potential financial aspect of three-cycle IVF treatment in this region, it will be delivered. It needs to be delivered because if we continue not to do so, we will fall further behind the standards of IVF treatment provided in other member states of the European Union and many other parts of the United Kingdom.

An all-party parliamentary group report on this very question was prepared in 2011. The group was chaired by Gareth Johnson MP and was able to collate a lot of statistics. The group noted that in 1999, some 595,000 babies were born in the UK, 8,337 of whom — 1.4% — were born as a result of assisted reproduction treatment (ART). In 2004, it was shown that the UK was falling behind European counterparts in

the amount of fertility treatment provided and, consequently, the proportion of babies born as a result of ART.

The survey that was conducted for the all-party parliamentary group showed that in 2000, there were 580 cycles of fertility treatment per million people in the UK, compared with an average of 1,057 per million in other northern European countries. In Denmark, for example, the proportion of babies born following ART was 3.7% of the total number of national births, compared with a figure for the same period of around 1% in the UK. It is not that the system that we operate is the worst in Europe — far from it. However, the point was well made by colleagues in Westminster in 2011 that it is also far from the best in Europe. I suppose it is particularly concerning, given that the guidelines to make it possible for these figures to radically improve have been available since 2004.

In summing up my short contribution, I appeal to the Minister to continue to prioritise this area of work and I look forward to his having good news to give to the many thousands of couples who, for one reason or another, are not able to conceive in the ordinary way. I hope that he may be able to send them the greatest gift that anyone can be sent: the possibility of entering parenthood through assisted reproduction treatment.

**Mr McCarthy:** I am delighted to make a contribution on this very important and sensitive issue, as has been said. It is a very significant matter, potentially affecting one in six couples, according to my notes, but as our Health Committee Chairperson said one in seven, I accept her knowledge.

Infertility can be a source of incredible stress and heartbreak for many people. With advances in medical technology and techniques, we have a duty to respond where we can make a practical difference to people's lives. Since this Assembly came into being, back in 1998, considerable interest and concern has been shown by many Assembly Members. Addressing infertility is a problem with many dimensions, as has been said. Those include the eligibility age for women, length of waiting lists, variance in access to IVF across different regions and investment in support counselling for couples.

The central issue is the number of cycles of IVF treatment that should be available in Northern Ireland. The NICE guidelines set out what the term "full cycle" is properly understood to mean, and that is fresh and frozen embryo transfer. Full cycles offer a considerably increased chance of a successful pregnancy. NICE has been recommending that health trusts offer three full cycles since as far back as 2004. The evidence suggests that such treatment substantially increases the chance of success by as much 60%. The NICE guidelines are based on clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness. The guidelines are to be revised this year, and it is almost certain that there will not be any regression recommended.

In Northern Ireland, the current policy is to aspire to three full cycles, as recommended in the NICE guidelines. However, as I understand it, not even one full cycle is offered in Northern Ireland at present. Surely, we can do better. One fresh transfer is offered in Northern Ireland, but that does not constitute a full cycle of IVF, which comprises a fresh transfer and a frozen embryo transfer. People are offered the fresh embryo part only. That is a fudge, as it makes it sound as though people here are being offered one full cycle. Also,

there is a knock-on ethical issue here, because people are effectively left to follow up the frozen embryo transfer themselves privately, with considerable associated costs.

Northern Ireland is not only badly out of step with the NICE guidelines but increasingly out of step with policy and practice in other parts of the UK. As I understand it, up to three full cycles are offered in Scotland and parts of England, while up to two full cycles are offered in Wales. Again, it is worth stressing that, in practice, not even one full cycle is offered in this region. It is important that Northern Ireland takes heed of NICE's expert opinion and makes strenuous efforts to implement the guidelines at the earliest opportunity.

I expect — indeed, I would be surprised if anything other than this were to happen — that the Minister will stress his good intentions in the area but caution that he does not have the resources to make the necessary investment to publicly offer the recommended three full cycles. We await his response with interest. However, I urge the Minister to listen to the strength of feeling on the issue in the Assembly and in the wider community and to make it a priority. Indeed, I think that it is important for the Minister and the Department to factor in some of the economic costs of not offering three full cycles.

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

**Mr McCarthy:** For example, there are knock-on costs in respect of counselling and dealing with mental health issues. It is critical that the Minister seizes the opportunity —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Time is up.

**Mr McCarthy:** — to make a real difference to the lives of many people in our community. I support the motion.

**Ms Brown:** I also support the motion. Children are a blessing and a gift, and we can sometimes take them for granted and as a given. However, as already mentioned, that is not necessarily the case for one in six couples or one in seven couples — take it as you will. The inability to conceive naturally is, therefore, a fairly common problem that is rarely discussed and rarely aired in public.

The inability of couples to have children naturally gives rise to a number of problems, including psychological problems, resulting in couples and individuals having to seek psychological support. That is recognised in the process of infertility treatment, as couples are given psychological support through counselling before, during and after treatment. Fertility problems are possibly increasing as couples tend to marry and have children later on in life rather than earlier. Today, many people put off having children for a variety of reasons, such as their careers or, increasingly, money and financial stability.

#### 11.45 am

A woman's natural fertility decreases after the age of 35 and, again, after 40. Those who delay having a family are more likely to face fertility problems and, subsequently, become highly frustrated at not being able to have their own children. There was no publicly funded service prior to 2001, and those who wished to access fertility services and specialised care had to pay for it. That was considered and recognised to be inequitable.

Arrangements were then put in place to develop a publicly funded service, initially on an interim basis. Criteria for access were developed at that time. In 2003, a full consultation entitled 'From People to Parents' was issued. In 2006, after a long period of consultation and engagement with numerous stakeholders, changes were made to the criteria. In 2007, another review of policy was carried out at the request of the Assembly, with changes implemented in 2009. The length of time that people waited on the list was a prominent issue at that time. Additional money was provided to try to reduce that and, therefore, speed the process from referral to treatment.

The focus of the debate is the provision of three full IVF cycles rather than one, which is the case under the health service in Northern Ireland. Any additional cycles can be undertaken privately, of course, as a private patient. As has been mentioned, it is stated that there is a 60% better chance of success if three cycles are completed. That can, therefore, provide a couple with hope, as well as increasing their chances of success in having a family.

Unfortunately, as is the case with many things, money and resources are central to the issue. The Minister is on record as stating that we cannot afford it. Officials from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety told us in Committee that their main focus is to ensure that couples wait no more than 12 months for treatment. It remains an aspiration, in line with guidelines that were issued by NICE in 2004, that we reach a stage when women can be offered up to three cycles. I believe that it is worth looking into that to see whether three cycles or at least one full cycle of IVF can be funded. I also want to ensure that the Department takes account of the findings of the review that is being undertaken by NICE into the provision of IVF and fertility treatment in general.

**Ms P Bradley:** I, too, support the motion as a Member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety. It is distressing for any person to live with infertility. How a family choose to cope with that situation depends very much on their values and beliefs. For families who enter into in vitro fertilisation treatment, the decision often comes after much discussion and soul searching. The process that they will enter is complex. The combination of necessary hormones to produce the required number of eggs for harvesting, the stress that is involved in completing the treatment, and the length of time that people wait to access the service through the NHS mean that the process can put extraordinary stress on people's emotional health.

The sad fact is that one in six or seven couples will experience infertility and will have to face a number of decisions as a result. This year will mark 34 years since the first IVF baby was conceived and born. Every year, throughout the UK, many babies continue to be born via IVF. Having children is a choice for people, and infertility cruelly removes that choice. We have the technology to help to take control of that once again. There are a number of reasons why a person may experience fertility issues that make conception difficult. Couples can access counselling before and during treatment to help them to manage the stresses and strains of that treatment. We must ensure that we give couples the best possible opportunity to conceive through the NHS.

As has been said, women are more likely now to delay having children until they are established in their careers. I

am pleased that, from April 2007, the age limit for females was raised to 39 years. That has meant that women who experience fertility problems in their early thirties are able to access that important service. I am also incredibly proud that Northern Ireland has some of the least restrictive criteria for accessing NHS funding for IVF treatment. Women in Northern Ireland can be confident that personal circumstances will not restrict them from joining the waiting list for access to IVF treatment. I am also very proud that we have managed to reduce the waiting lists so that couples can now access IVF services in a more timely manner. In some respects, that will help to alleviate the stress of infertility on couples and their wider family circle.

I agree that the time is right to increase the number of IVF cycles that couples can be offered, in line with NICE principles. I believe that the Department should move to ensure that NICE's 2004 recommendations are implemented. Advances in technology may mean that there will be new recommendations, and we should endeavour to put those in place as soon as possible to enable us to continue to provide the best healthcare, which the people of Northern Ireland deserve.

Funding for IVF is like any other type of funding: there will always be those who support the provision and those who would like to see the money spent in other areas of healthcare. The fact remains that infertility can seriously affect a couple's emotional and mental health. The feeling that their family is not complete is a reality for a lot of couples. I support the funding of IVF to ensure that we, as a society, give couples the maximum chance of having a family. Some couples end up spending their life savings trying to complete their family, and some can put themselves into serious debt in order to achieve that dream. We, as a society, should ensure that we provide as much help and support to those couples as we can. NICE has achieved that by identifying that access to three cycles of IVF gives the optimum chance of conceiving.

We must also remember that not every person who conceives will go on to have a baby at the end of pregnancy. Sadly, miscarriages and stillbirths are still very much a reality and every couple's nightmare. Imagine a couple who have had their one chance of IVF and have experienced a miscarriage or a stillbirth, only to realise that they cannot continue to try to conceive. Of course, another cycle of IVF does not guarantee that the outcome will be different, but it is well known that the statistics suggest that if a woman has conceived once, she is likely to conceive again. Therefore, I suggest that we owe that couple the chance to have another cycle.

Obviously, access to IVF cannot and should not be unlimited. There has to be a limit at some point. Some couples are fortunate to conceive at their first attempt and realise their dream of having a child. Therefore, it is not anticipated that every person who joins the waiting list will need three full cycles, while many others will decide not to go down the route of IVF.

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

**Ms P Bradley:** However, for those who are not fortunate enough to conceive at the first attempt and who wish to carry on, we should ensure that they have that opportunity regardless of economic standing.

**Mr McCallister:** Like other Members, I do not think that there is much in the motion that is terribly controversial. There was support from all parts of the Committee, and having listened to the debate, I know that there is support from around the House.

There are several issues that are worth mentioning and focusing on. The counselling aspect is important. Many of us will know friends, family members or constituents who have been through the process and will know of the heartache and disappointment for some and of the joy of starting a family for, hopefully, many others. That is something that many people cherish and will remember for the rest of their life. It is important to get that counselling support for families and couples as they go through treatment.

It is vital that, where possible, we follow the NICE guidelines. Too often, we look at NICE guidelines and then decide how we can follow them in the cheapest way to deliver the service that is required. If NICE has suggested that we should endeavour to follow its guidelines, we should not penalise people by giving them a lesser service than they can expect in other parts of the UK. We should strive to deliver the same standards.

We have heard from previous contributors that the statistics show that chances of conception improve if couples can undertake the recommended three cycles of IVF. That is something that we should strive to deliver. I am quite sure that the Minister will be keen to deliver on that and make sure that we match the NICE recommendations and the support of the Committee and Members of this House with action on delivering it.

We must make sure that new advances in our fertility centre are constantly looked at, as was mentioned by my colleague Mr Gardiner, and that any new advances or practices are quickly adopted here and used to deliver the best outcomes for couples that we can possibly deliver and the best outcomes for money. It is all about getting a good result for couples — the birth of a healthy baby — and about supporting them on the journey through the treatment. Huge disappointments and setbacks can befall couples who go through the treatment, and it can be a very challenging time. However, the hope is that, with a family at the end of it, the process is worthwhile. We all support that, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's contribution.

**Mr Allister:** I had not intended to speak in this debate but having listened to it, I find that there are issues that need to be ventilated. The previous contributor told us that there is nothing controversial about this issue, but there are ethical issues that touch on it. All of us, of course, who have had the privilege of being parents know the great joy of that and can understand the great disappointment of couples who desperately want to be parents and have not succeeded. Therefore, I am sure that all of us can empathise with finding solutions for their difficulties, and there is nothing wrong in that.

However, there are three tangential issues that touch on the matter and give me some questioning concern. The first pertains to the fact that, ultimately, as part of the process, there is destruction of unused embryos. A human embryo is, biologically, a living human being at the earliest stage of its development. Of course, it is dependent on the mother to nurture it and give it life, but, genetically, it



is a distinct organism, different from both the egg and the sperm from which it grew. It does, in effect, need nothing more than the nourishment of the mother to grow into a recognisable human being. That is a point on which those who might take a religious perspective and those who might take a purely scientific perspective can probably agree. We have an arrangement where, ultimately, some embryos are destroyed. There is an ethical issue.

The second issue that I have concerns about is the development of processes, particularly in the United States, for sex selection in IVF treatment. Perhaps the Minister can tell us how far, if at all, that is permitted in Northern Ireland's arrangements.

The third issue that concerns me — it is not referred to in the NICE guidelines from what I can see — is the question of the use or abuse of IVF treatment by lesbian couples. There was a case in Scotland just a couple of years ago in which a lesbian couple challenged the health service's refusal to afford them IVF treatment. They got the backing of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and public money to do it, and they were preparing to take themselves into court on the issue when the health service backed down.

So I would like to hear from the Health Minister what the position is in Northern Ireland on that. Is IVF treatment available to lesbian couples, who can, as it were, be treated equally under legislation with other, regular couples desperate to have a child?

#### 12.00 noon

Therefore, when someone says that there is nothing controversial and nothing touching upon ethical issues about this, that is a naive misconception. There are ethical issues that need to be addressed. Of course we all want to help as many childless couples as we can but we cannot stampede through the ethics of the matter with no regard to what is right. With those few thoughts, I conclude my remarks.

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** I welcome the opportunity to hear the views of MLAs on this motion and, indeed, I welcome the opportunity to respond to it. I thank the proposer of the motion for raising this important issue, which has been the subject of several letters to the Health Committee over recent months. I recognise that infertility can be a shattering problem for those affected and can impact on all areas of their lives. There is nothing so disappointing as when a couple get together and try for children for it not to happen, and I can fully understand the heartbreak that is involved for couples in those situations.

Fertility services may not always be as high a priority as other specialist services that, essentially, treat disease, but the impact of fertility services is hugely significant in that they provide couples with the opportunity to have a family, which, previously, would not have been possible for them. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the first baby born in Northern Ireland as a result of IVF. Publicly funded fertility services with interim access criteria have been available since 2001. As a result of public consultation, initial criteria that were agreed in 2006, including the upper age limit being raised and allowing women with dependant children to access the service, enabled more women to access the service. A further public consultation took place in 2009 and resulted in widening the access criteria further. For example,

the need to prove a stable relationship was removed, which one may question.

Our current access criteria are wider than those in many parts of the UK and allow more women to access the service. It should be noted that some areas of the UK do not offer fertility services at all or place access restrictions, such as having children from a previous relationship or either parent having a living child. The current NICE guidance was published in 2004, which was before my Department entered into agreement with the organisation. Therefore, the 2004 guidance has not been endorsed as applicable for health and social care. Despite that, we aspire to meet the recommendation of providing up to three cycles of treatment. However, current available funding makes that unachievable. The NICE guidance is being reviewed and is expected to be published in July 2012. The revised guidance will be considered for its applicability when published.

In Northern Ireland, we offer one fresh cycle of treatment to those who are clinically suitable for treatment. Although, as I have already indicated, that is less than the recommendation of up to three cycles, our access criteria offer more women the chance to avail themselves of treatment. Increasing the number of cycles offered would require additional recurrent funding, and in the absence of additional funding, offering up to three cycles would result in other criteria having to be tightened and could severely limit the number of women who could access the service. Following the 2009 review, the intention was that once the waiting list was stabilised at 12 months, a priority was to offer frozen embryo transfer. That was to be the first step in attempting to meet the NICE guidance recommendation.

The Health and Social Care Board has agreed with the Regional Fertility Centre that one treatment of FET should be offered to women who are clinically suitable. That will be offered to new referrals from 1 April 2012. That is a great step forward and should be applauded as it will offer women a further chance of having a family. There is just over £3 million recurrent funding for fertility services, and the investment has enabled the waiting list for treatment to be reduced to 12 months. As it costs approximately £3,500 for a cycle of IVF and £1,700 for FET, to increase the number of cycles offered from one to three would require a considerable investment in the service.

Our current waiting list targets are for a referral in nine weeks, a review in three months and treatment in 12 months. Those targets and the investment in services have shortened overall time from referral to treatment from around 24 months to 17 months. Again, that is good news. At February 2012, there were 575 on the active waiting list for treatment: 235 for IVF and 340 for intracytoplasmic sperm injection. In addition, there were 65 patients awaiting an initial appointment, all of whom had received a partial booking letter asking them to contact the service to book into an appointment slot.

I appreciate that those who use fertility services are keen to have access to the maximum number of cycles possible. However, I trust that the information that I have passed on has demonstrated that the service that we are providing is the best that is possible with the existing funding. I would like to be able to make three cycles of fertility treatment available to those who need the services, but, unfortunately,

that is not possible with the current funding. Despite the financial constraints, we intend to offer FET to new referrals.

I will deal briefly with some issues that have been raised. All those in the Committee support counselling, and we recognise the importance of counselling for people who are unable to have children and, indeed, for people who are receiving treatment. In the past few years, additional recurrent funding of £51,000 has been made available for counselling of that nature.

I was asked about the NICE recommendations for the three full cycles. As I indicated, we will offer frozen embryo transfer as part of the package now, and that should be a significant asset. Across the UK, on average, 32.3% of such treatments are successful for those under 35. It falls quite dramatically by the time people are 39, and beyond that, it falls even more dramatically. Perhaps we need to look at and address that. If we were to up the number of cycles, should we look at excluding those areas where it is less successful? All that would have to be taken into consideration.

There was also a query about whether we have had the chance to consider the test that Mrs Overend raised at one point. That has not yet been considered by NICE, but we will get new NICE guidance in July 2012, and I trust that it will have had the opportunity to look at that issue and give guidance on it.

Mr Allister raised the issue of sex selection. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority gives guidance on the storage of embryos and the length of time that they are stored for. That is governed by the HFEA. I certainly would not approve of any sex selection. That has been used in countries such as China over the years, and it is a huge human rights violation. There has been somewhere in the region of 400 million cases of infanticide, and the population is now much more predominantly male than female. I believe that such tampering with nature is hugely retrograde and will damage that society in due course. Mr Allister also raised the issue of same-sex couples. IVF treatment is available to all couples who meet the criteria in Northern Ireland, as set out by previous guidelines.

I can give an assurance that when the revised guidance is issued by NICE in the summer, we will consider its application. We will take the views expressed this morning into full consideration at that time.

**Mr Wells:** My wife and I are privileged in having three children, and I concurred with Mr Allister when he referred to the happiness that that has brought us. However, I am also aware of friends, neighbours and members of my church who have found it difficult, if not impossible, to have children and the huge amount of pain that that has caused those couples. That was reflected in many of the comments made today by various Members. Infertility can be a heartbreaking condition, and not being able to have children can have a serious impact on couples' health and well-being.

It is obvious from the contributions of the Health Committee and other Members that we in the House take the issue seriously. We are also aware, as the Minister has pointed out, the point was raised by many, including Mr McCarthy, that by not making three full cycles of IVF available to couples, we are, in fact, breaking the guidelines set out by NICE in 2004.

We recognise that progress has been made over the past 10 years but we believe that a lot more work is needed.

The Chair of the Committee succinctly set out the current situation. One in seven couples has problems conceiving. There has been some progress, but the NICE guidelines are that there should be three full cycles. Sadly, 80% of those who have only one cycle of treatment are not successful. That must be an extremely distressing period in their lives. The overall cost quoted was £250,000 per annum, which sounds like a lot of money, but, of course, that is set against a very large health service budget.

Gordon Dunne was the first of many MLAs to raise the very complex moral issues associated with IVF treatment. Those were expanded on by Mr Allister and referred to by the Minister. I have absolutely no doubt that, for some Members, certain aspects of IVF treatment throw up desperately difficult moral problems. Sam Gardiner mentioned the contribution by Mrs Overend in September 2011. The Minister responded to that, but it was an interesting point that she raised. I am sure that through Assembly questions for written answer, we will be able to dig a bit deeper on that very important point.

Conall McDevitt was his usual articulate self and made some very interesting contributions about the differences between Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe. Some of the statistics show that we are very out of line with our European friends.

Kieran McCarthy highlighted the ethical risks involved with dealing with frozen embryos and called on the Minister to make that a priority. I think that Mr McCarthy has included that line in every speech that he has ever made in the Assembly. The problem is that if the Minister were to make everything that Mr McCarthy wanted a priority, nothing would be secondary and everything would be at the top of the pile. That would be difficult, but I certainly understand the points that he made.

Pam Brown brought to the debate a very interesting new point about the number of couples marrying and having children much later. The demands of modern life mean that people feel that they are not in an economic position to have children early, or perhaps they wish to pursue career opportunities. Therefore, the point of first birth is getting later and later — my mother had her last child when she was 46, so I have very clear memories of the difficulties that that can cause. That is one of the reasons why fertility rates are dropping quite dramatically. Ms Brown's point is one to be applauded.

#### 12.15 pm

Paula Bradley alerted us to the fact that it is over 30 years since the first IVF child was born. In Northern Ireland, I understand that it was 25 years ago. She mentioned the enormous emotional distress that infertility causes couples who are unable to conceive. We need to constantly remember in this debate that we are dealing with real humans who are hurting desperately. Some couples have been able to put it behind them and move on with their lives because it has not haunted them, but it has caused the most dreadful trauma for other couples. During any conversation, they are very quick to raise the fact of the pain that has been caused as a result of their childlessness.

Ms Bradley also stated that Northern Ireland has some of the least restrictive access criteria in the United Kingdom. That is to be welcomed. She made the very valid point that it cannot be limitless; there has to be a threshold, which is set by NICE at three cycles. In other words, even in the very easy-going approach to this issue in the rest of the United Kingdom, couples cannot come back for a fourth or fifth cycle of treatment. There has to be a point at which couples have to accept that, unfortunately, it just is not going to happen. The limit of three is relevant, but, of course, in Northern Ireland, we do not even have that at the moment.

John McCallister raised a novel point about the importance of counselling to the couples who are going through that traumatic period in their lives. He also said that we should not always look at what the cheapest option is but the one that is best for couples in that situation.

Jim Allister made an interesting contribution about the ethical problems that are associated with IVF treatment. He mentioned his concern about the destruction of unused embryos. I was quite alarmed to hear — perhaps it happened under direct rule; I am certain that it did not happen under the present Minister's regime — that there is no test now about whether there is a sustainable relationship ongoing before IVF treatment is administered. I believe that children are best brought up by married couples. Therefore, given the fact that there are huge demands on the resources of the Department to provide IVF treatment, it should be prioritised for those who can give the best upbringing to the children, which, in my opinion, is married couples. They should take priority. I am very worried that the guidelines have been amended in the past to allow, basically, people who have no relationship with anyone to have IVF treatment. That worries me in the context of limited resources.

**Mr Poots:** To clarify: that was amended in 2009.

**Mr Wells:** That happened under the previous Administration and Mr McGimpsey. I do not think that the Assembly was made aware of that change. Had it been brought to the House, several Members would have expressed their concern about it. That has slipped through and it needs to be looked at again.

Mr Allister raised the issue of sex selection. I am glad that the Minister forthrightly said that he was totally opposed to any form of sex selection when it comes to IVF treatment. We have seen the whole issue of sex selection in abortions, which are clearly being practised in other parts of the United Kingdom. Many of us in the House find that utterly repugnant, so I am glad that he has made that absolutely clear. I am concerned, however, that IVF treatment may be administered to same-sex couples. Again, given limited resources and the fact that so many married couples are desperate to have the treatment, priority should be given to them.

This has been a timely debate and one in which very important points have been made. We accept, of course, as the Minister said, that we are down to the issue of resources and so many competing priorities. The point has been made that we are talking about £250,000. That would still equate to three consultants or eight or nine senior nurses, so you have to look at it in that context. Equally, however, as a person who lives in the United Kingdom, we need to avoid a —

**Ms S Ramsey:** I thank the Deputy Chair for giving way. I accept that, in these grave times, we are looking at every penny. However, on the back of what was said in the debate about counselling and some people experiencing a lot of pressure in their lives, sometimes we need to spend a pound to save a lot of money. If people got a third cycle of IVF using the amount of money that we spend on counselling, it might save money in the long run.

**Mr Wells:** I agree with the Chair and Member for West Belfast. The difficulty that the Department faces at the minute is firefighting; we need to save money now. The savings that she indicated are long term. It may be that we do not have the luxury to take those into account. We are not talking about a huge amount, but at the end of the day, there are so many competing priorities and so many people tugging the Minister's heart strings to encourage him to spend extra money. It is a Wisdom of Solomon situation.

I go back to the point that I made earlier: we are part of the United Kingdom — some of us like that and some do not — and, therefore, it is important that when it comes to this vital treatment, someone in Basingstoke is treated the same as someone in Belfast. Our long-term aim should be to move to the situation in which couples in Northern Ireland can, by right, have three cycles of IVF. It was quite shocking to hear in the Chairman's comments —

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

**Mr Wells:** — the costs involved and to learn that couples are running up huge bank debts to achieve what many of us are blessed with, which is a happy family and children.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to fund three full cycles of IVF treatment, including the subsequent transfer of any viable frozen embryos, as recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE); and further calls on the Minister to undertake a review of fertility services based on the updated NICE guideline on the assessment and treatment of people with fertility problems, which is due to be published in July 2012.*

## Marine Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

**Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment):** I beg to move

*That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 6 July 2012 in relation to the Committee Stage of the Marine Bill (NIA Bill 5/11-15).*

On Tuesday 6 March 2012, the Assembly referred the long-awaited Marine Bill to the Committee for the Environment for scrutiny. The Bill sets out a new framework for the seas around Northern Ireland that is based on marine planning, sustainable development, improved management for marine conservation and a streamlining of some aspects of marine licensing.

On 8 March, the Environment Committee agreed to call for written submissions from interested organisations and individuals. In addition to signposting notices in the press, 48 stakeholders were contacted directly, and a number have already indicated their intention to respond to the Committee's request. The Environment Committee believes that it is also essential that all 26 councils are given the opportunity to comment on the Bill. There is clearly a need for compatibility between marine and terrestrial planning, particularly where there is an overlap of responsibilities at the coastline. It is intended that marine planning will remain with central government, so in anticipation of the devolution of planning powers to a local level, councils will need to have an opportunity to comment on the Bill.

The Committee is fully aware that in Northern Ireland, marine functions are spread over several Departments. Thus, we have contacted all relevant Departments' scrutiny Committees, seeking evidence on any clauses that may be relevant to them. All of this will take time, so we have allowed until 27 April 2012 for responses. The Committee anticipates a high volume of submissions, from which it will select a number of respondents to provide oral evidence.

The Committee feels that it is essential that it is afforded the time to exercise its scrutiny powers to the full. I ask the House to support the motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Marine Bill.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 6 July 2012 in relation to the Committee Stage of the Marine Bill (NIA Bill 5/11-15).*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time. The sitting is, by leave, suspended.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.23 pm.*

*On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —*

**2.00 pm**

## Oral Answers to Questions

### Agriculture and Rural Development

**Mr Speaker:** Questions 7, 9 and 12 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

#### Single Farm Payments

1. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the processing of single farm payments. (AQO 1563/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development):** The single farm payment represents a significant part of the income of farm businesses, and my Department has a good track record in processing payments. The 2011 targets I set last November were exceeded, with over 85% of claims paid in December and over 90.2% in January 2012, compared with the targets of 83% and 90%. I anticipate that between 93% and 94% of all 2011 single farm payments will be completed by 31 March. In total, more than £246 million has been paid out to date. That leaves fewer than 7% of claims left to process, with a maximum of £21 million potentially still to be paid for the 2011 scheme year. Those claims are outstanding for a number of reasons, including the need to apply inspection findings, probate or, in some instances, simply because the claimant has not provided bank account details. Not all the remaining cases may be due a payment because of ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

This has been a challenging year in relation to the 5% of claims that required on-farm checks to verify the eligibility of land. Those checks identified a large number of changes in respect of field boundaries and ineligible land. In many cases the changes date back to 2005 and involve retrospective land area adjustments, which are complex and take longer to process.

Although I am pleased that my Department has met its targets and is also likely to meet EU requirements on payment processing, I am concerned at the level of payments still to be made. I recognise the difficult financial situation that some claimants now find themselves in, and I have asked my officials to develop a plan to speed up the processing of those cases. We have found a number of ways of improving the situation, including diverting staff to that work, introducing some software modifications and adjusting the detailed processing arrangements. The situation is being monitored, but early indications are that this has all helped to increase the number of payments being processed.

Let me add that, in light of the difficult financial circumstances that some claimants have identified, I have sought a meeting with representatives of the main banks. I intend to meet them over the next number of weeks. It is important that we impress on the banks that, in a lot of cases, just because payment has been delayed, that does not mean

that the claimant will not receive it. They may, in fact, receive it further down the line. That is important work.

**Mr Speaker:** I remind the Minister that there is a time limit.

**Mrs O'Neill:** Those are the investments that I am currently implementing in the Department.

**Mr I McCrea:** In her opening remarks, the Minister referred to the payment being a significant part of farm income. Certainly, having listened to what she said, I can only take it that she takes the matter very seriously. I could fill her desk with letters from constituents, but that will not get us any further.

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

**Mr I McCrea:** Can the Minister give an assurance that the actions that she has detailed will ensure that the payments will be made by 31 March?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I assure the Member that I am doing everything that I can in the Department to speed things up. As I said, we have met the targets. However, if you are in the percentage of people waiting for payment, it is obviously very frustrating. Things like putting in additional staff and modifying the software will all improve the payments. I asked the Department to look at it with a twofold approach: to look at the things we can do immediately to improve the situation this year with regard to the 2011 claims, and to ensure that, next year, we are not sitting in the same position, with a small percentage of people remaining to be paid after the date.

**Mrs D Kelly:** I note from the Minister's answer that some of the remedies have been tried before by the previous Minister. I want to know what this Minister has done differently to ensure that payments will be made. Can the Minister give us any indication of the number of appeals and when they will be heard?

**Mrs O'Neill:** It is important to say that 93% of all payments have been made. That is £246 million that has been paid out to rural businesses and into farmers' hands. That is a positive thing. However, I understand the frustrations that some people have had. As I said, this year has been particularly difficult, with the land parcel identification system (LPIS) project and remapping. A lot of staff have been put into that area of work. We have now asked 12 members of staff to go back to this work to make sure that we get the remaining people paid as quickly as possible. The appeals process will come after that date, and I am happy to keep the Member up to date on that.

My priority is to get the money into people's hands as quickly as possible. We are ahead of our target, but I understand that there is still a lot of frustration and that people are in genuine financial difficulty because they are waiting for their single farm payment.

**Mr Murphy:** The Minister has, of course, accepted that this had been a difficult area for some time. Will farmers who have an inspection in this and future years face the same delays in getting their payments?

**Mrs O'Neill:** We have plans to speed up the processing of next year's inspection cases. My work was twofold: trying to get this year's claims out as quickly as possible and looking at how we can speed up the inspections process for 2012. In particular, I am working to start inspections earlier for

2012 claims so that they can be completed earlier. The Member will be aware that the Commission does not allow payments to be made until all inspections are completed. If we were in a position to get those completed earlier, payments could be processed earlier. This year's teething problems with new software should be resolved by next year. Those are all positive things that point to the fact that, hopefully, we will not be in the same position this time next year.

**Mr Swann:** Thank you very much, Minister. You mentioned actions such as additional resources and software changes to accelerate payments. Your Department also advised that a refinement of processes was applied to accelerate payments. What refinement of processes did your Department carry out?

**Mrs O'Neill:** We are looking at the particular delays in each part of the process, from when an application is received right through to inspection and what comes back into the Department. I am happy to give the Member a lot more detail in writing of all the ins and outs.

### Common Agricultural Policy: Reform

2. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what engagement her Department is having with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the European Commission to help to ensure that Northern Ireland's views are included in negotiations regarding reform of the common agricultural policy post 2013 and, in particular, the mandatory greening measures of pillar 1. (AQO 1564/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I have had a number of meetings on CAP reform with the DEFRA Ministers Caroline Spelman MP and Jim Paice MP. Those included meetings around the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council in October and November 2011 and joint meetings with the other devolved Ministers on 25 October and 14 November 2011. Further meetings with Ministers Spelman and Paice will follow in the coming months, and I will attend upcoming EU Council meetings.

I met the EU Agriculture Commissioner, Dacian Cioloş on 14 November and again during a visit to Dublin on 19 January this year. I plan further meetings with Commission officials, including a meeting in April with Georg Häusler. It is my intention then to submit a position paper on CAP reform post 2013 to ensure that our views are well known within the Commission and that we provide firm views on the proposals.

The Member will be aware that I recently undertook a consultation on CAP reform. I thank all who responded to the consultation and availed themselves of the recent round of stakeholder meetings, when I went out and about and listened to views. Those roadshows were hugely beneficial in gathering information and hearing the views of farmers and the rural community on CAP reform. Not surprisingly, greening was a massive issue and was consistently raised at each of those meetings.

**Mr McCallister:** I am grateful to the Minister for her reply. The Minister will be aware from the consultation responses of concerns about pillar 1 being weighted too heavily towards environmental issues rather than food production. Does the Minister agree with the views of many that aspects of pillar 1 have already been achieved in Northern Ireland through measures in pillar 2?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I agree with the Member that we have farmers who are very mindful of the environment. That is their livelihood, and they protect their future. The point that we are making to the Commission is that one size does not fit all. We have very good greening here, and our farmers actively do that.

It would be easy for me to say that I supported the principle that CAP needs to deliver for the environment but could not support the principle set out in the CAP proposals because the greening requirements would have a severe impact on our farmers' competitiveness. However, our farmers are already doing a lot of that. Our fantastic agrienvironment schemes are commended across the board by environmental agencies. I think that we are doing a good job with greening, and that is the position that we will put to Europe.

**Ms Boyle:** Has the Minister had or will she have any discussions or engagement with Simon Coveney?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I have a very good working relationship with Minister Coveney TD, and CAP reform has been discussed at all the recent North/South Ministerial Council meetings, held in July and October and, more recently, in February. I will continue to have further discussions as the CAP reform negotiations progress.

I am pleased to say that there is a lot of common agreement on the positions that we are forming on CAP reform. Our respective officials work together and remain in close contact, as they have done over a number of years. I have often talked about the "Team Ireland" approach when it comes to CAP reform, and I am still very much wedded to that.

All the proposals on CAP reform will go through the Commission and the Parliament, so it is important that we have our 15 Irish MEPs on board to fight our corner out in Europe and that their approach is consistent with the one that we have been taking.

**Ms Ritchie:** I thank the Minister for her responses. Given that she is due to meet the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the appropriate Minister for agriculture in Britain in the next few months, will she detail the subjects that she is meeting them to discuss? Will she also provide assurances that she will work to protect the needs of farmers in Northern Ireland to ensure that the principle of conacre is honoured in the CAP reform and that the principle of an active farmer is honoured, so that all payments go to an active farmer rather than a landlord?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Whenever I meet the DEFRA Ministers, it is to discuss CAP reform, so the discussions will be about that general issue. We differ in our opinions on the overall budget for CAP reform, because the British Conservative Government would obviously do away with the CAP in the morning. We differ on that, but we do not differ on a lot of the individual issues, particularly active farming, greening and food security. So, we will continue to use all alliances that we have to make sure that we have a strong case in Europe.

I am totally sympathetic to the view that it should be active farmers who receive the payment and not non-active farmers who are just landowners. That is the position that we need to get to. When it comes to CAP reform, there are three main principles: maintaining the budget, simplification and flexibility. They will be key. You talked about the conacre market, which is a situation unique to us. Again, we need to

ask the Commission to be flexible so that we can suit the needs of our own industry.

## Single Farm Payments

3. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what changes are likely to the single farm payment scheme if the common agricultural policy reform proposals are adopted. (AQO 1565/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The proposals for the reform of the single farm payment published by the EU Commission on 12 October would result in a number of changes to the current system. The single payment would be replaced by a number of payments, including a basic payment, a greening payment and a top-up payment for new entrants. In addition, there are options to introduce coupled payments and payments for areas of natural constraint. The proposed changes, if accepted, would inevitably increase the complexity of the direct payments process. Another feature of the current proposals is a move away from historically based payments towards a flat-rate payment system, which would lead to the redistribution of payments among claimants. However, those proposals are up for negotiation and could change before a final agreement is reached.

As I said, I am using every opportunity and avenue open to me to ensure that the final agreed reforms meet the needs of local stakeholders. I plan to submit a paper to the European Commission in the near future to ensure that my position on the needs of farmers and rural communities in the North of Ireland is clearly heard.

**Mr Girvan:** I thank the Minister for her answer. However, the answer indicated that there will be an additional workload if the reform goes through. What would be the costs to the Department of administering that? What would be the staffing implications of the changes that would come through the CAP reform, if it were implemented?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I do not have any such costings at this stage. We are getting the framework correct, which means working on flexibility, simplification and maintaining our budget. However, your point is very valid, because the Commission is proposing to move from one single farm payment to possibly as many as six for all the different elements, whether it is for greening or new entrants. That would be a nightmare for the Department to administer and a nightmare for the farmers. In all the roadshows that I have done over the past month or so, people clearly said that they do not want to see that kind of system. We are still at the negotiation stage, and the negotiations will really intensify over the rest of this year.

## 2.15 pm

**Mr Hussey:** Is the Minister concerned that, due to its overcomplexity, the payment system will have the potential to increase the risk of future infraction fines?

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department engages with Europe and administers European funding probably more than any other Department. One thing that I have found very frustrating is that the Commission sets policies and then, five or six years later, may decide to audit how those are implemented and you find yourself faced with fines. The proposals on the table would be so hard to administer, even in terms of

defining an active farmer and measuring income. It would also be very hard to administer a move from one payment to as many as six payments, and I talked about that earlier. The Commission would be watching over every stage. As I said, we are at the negotiation stage, and we have to try to make the process as simple as possible.

**Mr McMullan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister and her team for engaging with the farming community in different parts of the Six Counties in the last few weeks. Indeed, the meetings ended up in Loughgiel. I am sure that the Minister will join me in congratulating Loughgiel Shamrocks on becoming All-Ireland club champions.

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

**Mr McMullan:** What is the Minister's overall reaction to the CAP reform package?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I had that public meeting in Loughgiel last week, and I absolutely congratulate Loughgiel Shamrocks on their win.

Overall, what I have said to date on CAP reform is that it is a work in progress. It is very much at the negotiation stage. What is on the table could not be described as anywhere near acceptable. The biggest disappointment is in respect of simplification. As I said, what is proposed is nowhere near simple. Concerns around the greening proposals stem from the fact that they will shrink our arable sector and make us move closer to a grass monoculture, which would be environmentally undesirable. As I said, it is a work in progress. It is a big negotiation that will intensify in the year ahead.

### Strangford Lough: Horse Mussels

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mike Nesbitt. *[Interruption.]* Order.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Do they call me leader?

**Mr Frew:** Will they call you leader?

**Mr Nesbitt:** Not yet.

4. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any decisions have been taken on the protection of the horse mussel reefs in Strangford lough following the meeting between her officials and the European Commission on 24 January 2012. (AQO 1566/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** This is an important matter that remains a priority for my Department and DOE. Following the publication of the Queen's University report in the summer of 2011, the Departments developed revised proposals for the future restoration of modiolus which we discussed with the Commission on 24 January. The Commission has confirmed that our proposals are insufficient, and we will consider carefully what additional measures are feasible.

We have just received formal confirmation of the Commission position. We will give careful consideration before responding in the next number of weeks to ensure that the Department's actions meet the Commission's expectations. I intend to meet fishermen to discuss options in the near future. We remain committed to the process and will work hard to implement timely actions that will meet the expectations expressed by the Commission and the Assembly.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I thank the Minister. Would the Minister care to confirm whether we are looking at a multimillion infringement fine and update us on that side of the fence? Does she accept that it is a failure on the part of her Department and one other that we find ourselves in this unpleasant position?

**Mrs O'Neill:** The issue has been going on for some time, as I am sure the Member is aware. Actions have been taken down through the years, such as increasing the exclusion zones and putting a management plan in place. The Queen's University report was key to taking an evidence-based approach to moving forward.

It is important to point out that the Queen's report, on which the Commission based a lot of its concerns, contains no evidence of a direct link between banning pot fishing and increasing the exclusion zones and restoration of the modiolus. In fact, there are areas in Strangford where no pot fishing takes place but there is still a deterioration of modiolus.

In moving forward, we have to be mindful of trying to maintain modiolus levels but also that people's livelihoods are dependent on pot fishing in Strangford. It is about taking a balanced approach, and I am committed to taking that forward. I am also committed to taking whatever action is necessary to ensure that we avoid any further fines, which could be up to £9 million if we are not able to crack the issues that the Commission has addressed.

**Mr W Clarke:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. How many vessels fish Strangford lough? What method of fishing is used? What is the value of the catch?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Strangford lough is restricted to vessels of 40 feet or less, and it can only be fished by pot fishing. Seven vessels fish there for longer than seven months a year, and they support over 20 people on a part-time basis. In 2009, the lough provided landings of langoustine, velvet crab, brown crab and lobster valued at £139,000. Therefore, there is a small industry there. Livelihoods depend on pot fishing on the lough. Therefore, any decision on the way forward has to be a balanced one.

**Mr McCarthy:** I commend the Minister for her efforts towards the fishermen on the lough. Has the Department considered compensation for fishermen who may find themselves unemployed because of European instructions?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I confirm to the Member that I intend to meet the fishermen over the next number of weeks, and I am sure that that issue will come up. I will be happy to explore it with them. However, first, we need to deal with the Commission and get an acceptable way forward. Once we do that, we can be in a position to explore any of that. However, it is important that I consult the fishermen on the way forward.

**Mr Dallat:** I wish to avoid the pessimistic mood that Mr Nesbitt appears to be in these days. What meetings have taken place between the Ulster Wildlife Trust and Queen's University, with a positive view to restoring the modiolus reef to favourable recognition in the European Union, rather than talking about the infringement measures that have been mentioned?

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Ulster Wildlife Trust decided to go straight to Europe as opposed to talking to the Departments here, and that is disappointing. However, we are addressing the issues that were raised in the trust's letter to the Commission through the Department of the Environment and my Department.

As I said, there is no evidence in the Queen's University report to suggest that banning pot fishing would lead to a restoration of modiolus levels. That needs to be borne in mind when a decision is taken on the way forward. There are also areas in Strangford where no pot fishing happens, and the modiolus levels are still pretty low. Therefore, given the fact that people's livelihoods depend on this, we need to take a balanced approach for the way forward.

### Local Government: Rural Funding

5. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in order to avoid unnecessary redundancies, what action is being taken to provide funding to ensure that council staff who deliver rural funding through local action groups and joint committees can continue to do so until the next European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development becomes available. (AQO 1567/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Council staff who carry out administrative duties to assist in the delivery of axis 3 of the rural development programme are employed under a service-level agreement with joint council committees, with which my Department has a contract to deliver the programme. The Department is not the direct employer of those staff.

Each joint council committee is permitted to utilise, by way of an administration budget, an amount equivalent to 20% of the funds disbursed on project grants. That means that, for every £5 spent on a project, £1 may be used towards administration. It is up to each joint council committee to manage those funds within the allocation and conditions linked to project spend.

The shape of the next programme and how it will be delivered is still under consideration. Indeed, the proposals from the European Commission are not yet agreed. As you will know, in December I announced a refocus for axis 3, which, in part, was driven by the low project spend and high administrative spend. I have asked for all areas to urgently examine their progress and to refocus by reallocating to higher investing measures and to target strategic projects. We must see the results of that coming forward to ensure that we do not return funds to Europe.

**Mr Givan:** I thank the Minister for that response. The Minister acknowledges that there will be a future scheme to deliver rural development funding. Obviously, it is important that there is a seamless transition from this scheme to the new one. As the Minister will know, staff are on fixed-term contracts, so all steps should be taken to avoid unnecessary redundancies in anticipation of a future scheme.

**Mrs O'Neill:** The point is well made. In respect of CAP reform, the rural development programme has an end date, as the Member has pointed out. Therefore, it is important that there is some contingency in place if the timescale in Europe slips.

**Mr Lynch:** Is it still the Minister's intention to invest further funds in rural broadband?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I have made broadband one of my priorities in the Department. That is why I recently announced that DARD will invest £5 million from the rural development programme in broadband. However, it is fundamental for me that future investments eliminate more of the "not spots" and areas where people have lines of under two megabits. It is key that that money is targeted at those areas and is not just put into a wider pot.

**Mrs Dobson:** I wrote to the Minister on this issue last month, raising the concerns of the rural support networks, including TADA in my constituency, about the lasting damage that funding uncertainty could wield against the valuable work that those groups conduct in rural communities. It is regrettable, Minister, that you are not able to agree to a meeting. However, can you tell the House whether you have had any meetings with representatives of rural support networks to hear their concerns on the issue?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I meet many groups many a time. I think that there are nine rural support networks, which do valuable work, and I appreciate the work that they continue to do. It is not always possible to meet everybody all of the time. If the Member wants to talk to me afterwards about any particular concerns about a network, I will be happy to discuss them.

**Mr Allister:** Is there any prospect, Minister, of the LAGs and joint committees doing their work more efficiently, given that figures recently supplied by you indicate that, whereas £14 million has been paid out of this funding, £7 million has gone on administration? Will you join me in urging the rejection of the preposterous proposal before the Armagh committee to refurbish the IRA monument in Crossmaglen?

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mrs O'Neill:** With regard to efficiency, I think that the level of administrative spend when any new programme is brought into being is higher at the start. You are right: you picked out that £7.5 million was the council's administrative spend. That sum is out of a total of £21.5 million, so £14 million was paid out in projects. The level of administrative spend is not unusual over the first years of any programme, although I think it is fair to say that the project spend has been lower. That has a lot to do with the current economic climate. That is why I announced in December that I wanted all clusters to urgently refocus on strategic projects and the reallocation of funds across the better spending measures.

I have told the Member before that the application regarding Crossmaglen is with the joint council committee, and it will make the decision on the way forward.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I want to follow on from the Minister's answers. Will she outline to the House the potential implications and costs for staffing going forward?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am not particularly sure what element of the costs the Member means. Some £7.5 million has been the administrative cost to date, and I have explained why I think that that is the case. The economic climate has meant that, if you compare that with the project spend, the figure looks distorted. However, I am happy to pick up the issue with the Member afterwards.

### Mental Health: Rural Areas

6. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the priority that should be given to addressing the issue of mental health in rural areas. (AQO 1568/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Providing a comprehensive service to address mental health issues in rural areas is a high priority of mine. As you are aware, as Chair of that Committee, the Health Department is the lead Department with regard to mental health provision. However, it can be a particular issue in rural areas due to their remote and isolated nature, and



the stigma attached to mental health means that it is not always openly discussed. I have met a number of mental health charities to discuss ways in which the Department can assist them in the work that they are undertaking in rural areas and to help to raise the profile and remove the stigma around mental health issues and suicide awareness.

I recently announced a £16 million package of measures aimed at tackling rural poverty and social isolation. Under that framework, my Department will be working in conjunction with the Public Health Agency and health trusts to provide a rural communities health checks programme. Through that programme, it is expected that 2,500 rural dwellers will avail themselves of a comprehensive screening service that may and could include signposting to various mental health services.

I have met many groups over the past 10 months, such as the Niamh Louise Foundation and Aware Defeat Depression. There are fantastic groups out there working in urban and rural settings and carrying out fantastic work. I want to continue to support them to do what they do, because a lot of the things that they have identified and raised with me are specific to rural areas.

**Ms S Ramsey:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is not that often that a city slicker like me gets to ask the Agriculture and Rural Development Minister a question. You are right: mental health does not know any borders or boundaries. I am delighted that it is a high priority. I am also delighted, Minister, that you have taken the opportunity to meet charities. Can you outline to us the issues that they have raised and the action you are taking to address those issues?

**Mrs O'Neill:** One of the issues raised by the mental health charities was that there appeared to be a stigma around mental health in rural areas. It is as if it is a taboo subject, and people do not want to talk about it. Sometimes, a culture of self-sufficiency can lead to reluctance to seek outside help, particularly with mental health issues. There are social factors in small rural communities, such as fear about confidentiality and about going to your GP for help and things being talked about. Those fears and tackling the issue of stigma is something that we need to address seriously.

I am working with two charities, the Niamh Louise Foundation and PIPS, that are organising a conference to promote mental health and well-being in rural areas. I am delighted to be part of that project. I look forward to bringing that conference into a rural area and the continuing work that will fall out from that.

**2.30 pm**

## Employment and Learning

**Mr Speaker:** Questions 3, 7, 9 and 10 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

### Youth Unemployment

1. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures he will take to tackle youth unemployment to ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the Work Programme in Britain. (AQO 1576/11-15)

**Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):** I am pleased to inform Members that since I last reported on youth unemployment at Question Time, the proposals put

forward by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) to address youth unemployment have been accepted by the Executive. The core elements of the new strategy will include early intensive diagnosis of employability skills; opportunities for taster work experience for clients while on benefits; individual skills and careers-focused assessments; sector-based work experience and training in areas of skills shortage; a new employer subsidy for up to one year; a new emphasis on continuing skills development and growth; and a range of new measures to help young people not in education, employment or training. These measures will be additional to existing provision by being targeted at skills development for economic growth. It is important to acknowledge that the measures are informed by local needs and circumstances as well as best practice from other jurisdictions, including Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

The measures will mean that due to earlier intervention than is currently offered, skills development can begin after 13 weeks of a benefit claim rather than at 26 weeks, the current mandatory trigger for entry to Steps to Work for 18- to 24-year-olds. The new measures will make provision for job-ready young people who, but for the current economic situation, would be in work, and for those who are some distance from the labour market and require considerable support to address their barriers. I am also planning to include what I will refer to as a skills premium for employers; a training grant of up to £750 to assist employers with formal training costs or £300 for shorter training on accredited courses.

I was pleased that the economic strategy endorsed by the Assembly last week recognised the impact that the recession has had on young people and included a commitment to actions and targets to directly address this issue. I am now engaging with the Finance Minister over the finalisation of this policy, including the critical issue of resourcing the new initiatives. Once the resourcing has been agreed and the policy finalised, I will make a fuller statement to the Assembly.

I believe that the policy will make a significant contribution to linking social and economic policy by building the skills base of our unemployed young people to prepare them for the jobs that will rebuild and rebalance the economy. At the same time, the measures will seek to ensure that no young person is left behind. We must build opportunity for all our young people, regardless of their abilities and circumstances.

**Mr Speaker:** I remind the Minister of the time limit. If the Minister needs more time, he can certainly ask for it.

**Mr Molloy:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Are the Minister and the Department learning any lessons from the JobBridge programme in the rest of Ireland? Are there similarities or flaws that they can look out for in our particular situation?

**Dr Farry:** I thank the Member for his question. I assure him that what we are doing is primarily about addressing the local circumstances in Northern Ireland. However, of course our experience of youth employment is mirrored across these islands and, indeed, much further afield. We are very happy to learn lessons from other jurisdictions, whether those are the good lessons or the lessons of what to avoid.

We are very happy to look at what is happening in the Republic of Ireland.

What we are about to undertake in Northern Ireland, and I must stress to the House that this is subject to financing decisions being made, will be very innovative. It is something that is desperately needed to address the situation for our young people.

**Mr Beggs:** Often it is lack of experience that holds back many of our young people who are seeking full-time employment. The Minister listed a number of programmes that he is running. However, is he receiving sufficient employment opportunities in which young people can receive that experience? What is he doing to try to increase the opportunities that are available to those young people?

**Dr Farry:** I thank the Member for his interest in this. I stress that what I am announcing today are intended to be new initiatives on top of what is currently offered to young people. However, it is only a policy in development. We are still awaiting decisions on the financing of the policy and are working actively with the Finance Minister on that. We have very good engagement with employers on this and, obviously, support from employers to give placements is absolutely critical to its success. Therefore, we are focusing very heavily on work experience. I have had meetings with all the representative employer bodies and other individual employers, all of whom were very enthusiastic about this and see an opportunity not just for them but for the wider economy in Northern Ireland.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I welcome the Minister's announcement today, and I look forward to tomorrow's meeting of the Employment and Learning Committee when he will go into more detail. Will he outline to the House any discussions that he has had with the Minister of Education, following on from Roy Beggs's question regarding post-16 work placements with regard to clearer objectives and outcomes?

**Dr Farry:** I thank Mr Ramsey for his interest in this and look forward to fuller engagement with the Employment and Learning Committee tomorrow. Certainly, the Minister of Education had an input into the paper and expressed a number of views. I also plan to meet the Education Minister as part of a routine bilateral in the next couple of weeks. No doubt, we will discuss how we can take the scheme forward and any particular interests that his Department may have in it.

### **Prison Officers: Skills Training**

2. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions he has had with the Minister of Justice about offering new skills training to prison officers who avail themselves of the voluntary staff exit scheme. (AQO 1577/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** I have not had any specific discussions with the Minister of Justice about skills training for prison officers who avail themselves of the voluntary staff exit scheme. Through the careers service, my Department offers free, impartial careers information, advice and guidance to clients facing career decisions. Prison officers who wish to avail themselves of the service may do so through the NI Direct web-based service, where they will find useful careers information and details of how to contact a careers adviser in their local area.

**Mr Hussey:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that it is important that prison officers who have given many years of service in difficult conditions are afforded the opportunity to retrain and that it is within his remit to ensure that those opportunities are provided?

**Dr Farry:** I recognise that this is a particular cohort of people coming through the system with a particular set of needs. We are not talking about a redundancy situation. This is, essentially, an early retirement situation. Those people will have the ability to make a further contribution to the economy. The careers service of my Department is available to everyone in Northern Ireland, including adults. It is an all-ages service. I strongly recommend that anyone in that circumstance makes contact with the careers service through their local jobs and benefits office and makes an appointment to discuss their future opportunities. We are extremely happy to help in that regard.

**Ms J McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Given the vast amount of money that has been set aside for severance, does the Minister agree that when an enhanced package like that is taken up, people should not be allowed to go back into the service and that a clause should be put in to state that?

**Dr Farry:** I thank the Member for her question. It is important that we distinguish responsibility. My colleague the Minister of Justice is probably much better placed to respond to that question. My Department is not providing a particular dedicated response to that cohort of workers. However, I stress that there is an all-ages careers service available to everyone in Northern Ireland, and it is available to people who are going through this scheme, as it is available to anyone else in Northern Ireland who wants careers advice. In today's society, people do not stay in the same job for their lifespan, and they want to change careers more frequently. Therefore, we are trying to place more emphasis on a careers service for adults.

**Mr I McCrea:** Although I agree with the initial question — it is important that work is carried out to ensure that prison officers can go into other employment — does the Minister accept that with regard to the wider loss of jobs in Northern Ireland, whether from a factory, industry or whatever, it is important for people to be more aware of the service available so that they can move into other types of jobs, and will he ensure that that information is more readily available?

**Dr Farry:** I thank the Member for his question. He made an incredibly important point, and it follows the previous answer I gave. People will be leaving or changing jobs or finding themselves out of work through no fault of their own, and it is important that we provide a full range, all-age service of careers advice to signpost people to the opportunities for retraining that are out there. The economy is our number one priority and our people are our number one asset. We cannot afford any inefficiency in the system where we do not make full use of people's skills, ability and potential to contribute to our economy.

### **Employment: People with Disabilities**

4. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to assist people with disabilities in finding employment. (AQO 1579/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** My Department has a range of pre-employment and employment programmes and services to prepare and support people with disabilities to find and retain employment. Specialist provision offered by the disability employment service includes an occupational psychology service, which carries out employment assessments for individual clients, including retention assessments for existing employees; the Workable programme, which provides long-term, in-work support, such as a specialist job coach, and may include disability training and education for employers; the Access to Work programme, which provides a variety of practical supports, such as assistance with travel to work and funding for specialist equipment; the condition management programme, which is delivered by health professionals to help people with disabilities to manage and overcome their work-related health problems; the return to work credit, which is a weekly grant of £40 paid to eligible benefit recipients earning less than £15,000 per annum; the job introduction scheme, which is a short job trial for someone with a disability trying to enter the labour market; and support for approximately 70 employees with disabilities at the Ulster Supported Employment Limited factory.

The Department is also about to tender formally for a new work connect programme, which will replace New Deal for disabled people. This provision, which will be available to clients on health-related benefits, will include flexible pre-employment support options to help people with disabilities to progress towards and move into employment.

The Department's provision is delivered on a pan-disability basis by staff, healthcare professionals and specialist employment providers who have the range of expertise required to meet the needs of people with disabilities who want to progress towards employment or to find and retain a job that is right for them. All provision can be accessed through specialist employment advisers based in jobs and benefits offices and jobcentres across Northern Ireland.

**Mrs Dobson:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he outline what extended eligibility is available for guaranteed training places for unemployed 16- and 17-year-olds with disabilities? Does he agree that it is crucial to get those people into employment?

**Dr Farry:** I thank Mrs Dobson for her interest in this area. Following the recommendations of the disability working group in 2008, the Department's Training for Success programme introduced a pre-entry training support service for potential entrants who have a disability. The programme offers extended eligibility for trainees up to the age of 22 who have a disability, and for those up to the age of 24 if they have a background in care. Participants are paid a non-means-tested education maintenance allowance. In addition, a supplement may be payable in respect of participants with a disability to assist providers in offering a significant additional input of resources, such as training time, equipment and support.

**Mr McEluff:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline the typical range and type of barriers that prevent people with disabilities finding meaningful jobs? What percentage of people with disabilities are categorised as unemployed?

**Dr Farry:** I will have to write to the Member with the specific statistics that he requested. Barriers are often more perceived

than actual, and I am very much of the opinion that every person in this society, with the proper support and encouragement, whether through their family or the state through the employment service or from companies has the potential to make a contribution to the economy and society. What is important is that we invest all that is necessary to unlock people's potential. The barriers that people have are very few and are often the perceptions of others rather than genuine barriers to people making a contribution. Where there is an issue, the workplace can be adapted to allow people to make contributions to various companies and the public sector.

#### 2.45 pm

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Does the Minister believe that it is necessary to review work schemes for disabled people following the closure of Remploy in Britain?

**Dr Farry:** I thank the Member for his question. I appreciate that what is happening in Great Britain is causing concern. However, I stress that employment matters are fully devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Indeed, we are the only region where employment matters are fully devolved. Rather than follow suit, we will do what we want to do in Northern Ireland. I have already made a commitment to Ulster Supported Employment Limited regarding the organisation's future. A lot of people appreciate its contribution. It recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, and I certainly see it having a very positive future in society.

#### Education Maintenance Allowance

5. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on any proposed changes to the education maintenance allowance scheme. (AQO 1580/11-15)

8. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the education maintenance allowance scheme, including the steps he is taking to ensure that it is targeted at students in greatest need. (AQO 1583/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 5 and 8 together.

My Department and the Department of Education are committed to the retention of the education maintenance allowance (EMA) scheme. It is clear, however, that the funding needs to be better targeted. Findings from our joint review, which began in April 2010, with the final report presented in December 2010, highlighted that the scheme is not as effectively targeted as it could be. That was because some two thirds of students receiving education maintenance allowance indicated that they would have remained in education even if they had not received it. The previous Committee for Employment and Learning also agreed that the scheme could be better targeted. However, we cannot ignore that, in some cases, it does make a real difference.

I am determined to ensure that young people from lower income families continue to be assisted to stay in education and training. My Department and the Department of Education are considering a range of options for the scheme's future. Once finalised, the options will be presented to the Executive, and a public consultation will follow. Any proposals to change

the current provision will also be subject to the appropriate equality considerations.

**Mr Dunne:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he briefly indicate how the income assessment will work?

**Dr Farry:** It is probably fair to say that Mr Dunne's question is a little premature. We are looking at a range of options for the future of EMA. That is subject to ongoing discussions between my Department and the Department of Education because it is a joint policy. A consultation will roll forward, and decisions will then have to be taken by the Ministers in question and, ultimately, the Executive. We will certainly give full and proper consideration to all the viable options before us.

**Mr A Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First, can the Minister give a categorical assurance that EMA will be retained? Would he consider including members of the Give and Take scheme on the entitlement list for EMA?

**Dr Farry:** I thank Mr Maskey for his question. I can certainly give him a categorical assurance regarding the retention of EMA. We are not in the business of abolishing EMA but reforming it. I am certainly aware of the interest in extending EMA to pre-vocational schemes, and we had a detailed discussion about that in the House. There are a number of parity and legislative issues that we would have to consider. It is certainly not a simple issue for us. It is important to understand the rationale for introducing EMA in the first place. It was very much linked to full-time school and FE provision. We are aware of the concern that has been expressed about this. I would certainly like to see more money being invested in young people. We need to consider whether the extension of an EMA-type scheme is the most effective way of helping young people or whether other types of scheme may be more productive in achieving the result that most Members want to see.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I note the Minister said that his research suggests that EMA makes no difference to some two thirds of those in receipt of it. Can he inform the House of the total sum of money that we are talking about?

**Dr Farry:** I thank Mr Nesbitt for his question. It is not so much my research but research by PricewaterhouseCoopers, which was commissioned back in 2010, that illustrated that. At present, the total budget for EMA is about £28 million or £29 million. It is in that range. Given the current economic situation in Northern Ireland and the financial pressures that face a lot of households, there is an upward pressure on EMA costs at present. However, there is potential for some efficiencies to be found and for money to be used for other more productive purposes.

**Mr McDevitt:** Can the Minister tell us whether any areas of overlap have been identified between the ongoing review of EMA and the proposed strategy for young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)? If so, what are they specifically?

**Dr Farry:** These are areas that we are extremely mindful of. The NEETs strategy is on schedule to be put before the Executive in April this year. It is important to stress that the work that we are undertaking with the Department of Education is a discrete piece of work on EMA, as it is currently conceived, that looks at different options around all that. The wider considerations that, I think, the Member is talking about will primarily be addressed through the NEETs strategy.

## Engineering Skills Working Group

6. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the establishment of an engineering skills working group. (AQO 1581/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** I recently identified manufacturing, specifically in relation to food processing, advanced engineering and advanced materials, as a priority sector for my Department in light of its importance to the rebalancing of Northern Ireland's economy. Employers and their representative bodies from the advanced manufacturing sector have recently been expressing to me their concerns about a shortage of appropriately skilled engineers who are available to work in the industry. Skills are widely accepted as the key raw material in the modern knowledge-based economy, and they are one of the main drivers in achieving our economic goals. A matter of key importance to me is addressing identified skills shortages and skills mismatches in priority sectors. I have asked my adviser on employment and skills, Bill McGinnis, to meet a range of employers in the sector to discuss their specific skills needs. That will build on the findings of his report, 'Identification of Priority Skill Areas for Northern Ireland'.

The adviser's findings will form part of a scoping exercise to identify and examine the specific skills issues that face that diverse and complex sector. Recently, as part of that exercise, officials met a number of employers and their representatives to move the information-gathering process forward. When the scoping exercise is complete and the issues have been identified and analysed, I will take a decision on the appropriate way forward to ensure that effective action can be taken as soon as possible.

That work builds on work that is being advanced by my Department on skills shortages in the food-processing sector. I have established a future skills action group to identify the sector's current and future skills needs. It is working on an action plan, which I expect to publish shortly.

**Mr Lynch:** Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. How soon will the working group be up and running? Will there be specific focus on rural areas where engineering has been a mainstay of the local economy?

**Dr Farry:** I thank Mr Lynch for his question and his interest in the matter. At present, we are doing a scoping exercise. Certainly, I am pressing my officials to do that as quickly as possible because I am very aware of the issues that are coming through. Members of the House are also picking up on them. We will have to see what the precise means of intervention will be, based on evidence that comes before us, after that exercise is complete. It may well be a working group that is similar to the ICT working group that we are looking at currently.

With regard to the rural aspects of that, again, I am very mindful that the issue has been raised by a number of rural MLAs. In particular, we have heard proportionately more concerns being expressed from the west of Northern Ireland than from other parts. Certainly, we are very mindful of factoring that into our considerations.

**Mr Kinahan:** As we are discussing better engineering skills, I wonder whether the Minister would praise Ballyclare High School on its brave defensive skills, which failed to win it

the schools' cup yesterday. How will the scoping exercise affect schools?

**Dr Farry:** I pay tribute to all schools involved in yesterday's competitions, including my old school, Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock, which was extremely successful in the football. We have great sporting prowess coming through, which is, again, very much to Northern Ireland's advantage.

The Member's specific point about schools is critical. Through the model that we are pursuing for ICT, we are trying to bring the Department of Education and the employers around the table to talk through the particular issues in the curriculum. If the issue is with the curriculum in schools, we will encourage intervention at that level, and if the problem lies in colleges and universities, our focus will be there. We will scope it out and follow the evidence.

**Mr McCarthy:** The Minister mentioned ICT in his response to an earlier question. Will he give the Assembly an update on the ICT working group?

**Dr Farry:** I thank Mr McCarthy for his question. In some respects, the ICT working group may be the model for the way forward. The group has met twice and is due to meet again this Thursday. The various actors around the table are discussing a draft action plan. I hope that we will make a great deal of progress in finalising that over the next couple of months, with the intention of having a final action plan in place by June. This was always designed as a short, targeted intervention, rather than something that is drawn out and wastes people's time. We want to see results as quickly as we can and are focused on a short timescale.

**Mr Speaker:** Question 7 has been withdrawn, question 8 was grouped with question 5, and questions 9 and 10 have been withdrawn.

## Step Ahead

11. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the plans he has for the Step Ahead programme when funding ends. (AQO 1586/11-15)

**Mr Kinahan:** I was not expecting that.

**Dr Farry:** You are back again. I previously indicated to the Assembly my intention to reinstate a variant of the Step Ahead strand of the Steps to Work programme. However, the budget allocation for my Department in 2012-13 does not allow me to do so. A bid may be made for additional resources in the June monitoring round. If successful, it will allow me to introduce a variant of Step Ahead.

**Mr Kinahan:** I thank the Minister for his answer. I am a little caught out. If the Step Ahead strand is replaced, how will it be made to work for local areas?

**Dr Farry:** I thank Mr Kinahan for his supplementary question. That strand would be available across Northern Ireland. Through it, we would respond to the particular needs of the voluntary and community sector. As the Member will appreciate, the Step Ahead 2012 programme was introduced at the beginning of January for a 10-week period. That was a short-term, targeted intervention made possible through monitoring round moneys. It was targeted at 18- to 24-year-olds, lone parents and those over the age of 50.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member is not in her place for question 12.

## DEL: Dissolution

13. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department has had any discussions with trade union representatives regarding the proposed dissolution of the Department. (AQO 1588/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** I recently met representatives of the Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NICICTU) to discuss a range of employment law matters. The Northern Ireland Committee raised the issue of my Department's dissolution and indicated that it would respond to the First Minister and deputy First Minister's exercise to take the views of key stakeholders. The committee wanted to understand whether there would be any implications for staff. I should stress that any decision about the future of my Department will be taken by the Executive and the Assembly, not by me.

**Mr Byrne:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Will the Minister assure the unions that their considerations on future employment will be fully understood and accepted by the Executive?

**Dr Farry:** I thank Mr Byrne for his question. It is a serious question, as the current uncertainty feeds through to employees thinking about their situations. Ultimately, those staff members are employees of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and will be treated and absorbed as such.

I have been at great pains to ensure proper communication in my Department, from the permanent secretary down through our human resources section. The door is very much open to employees to discuss the political situation and to reassure them about how the future will unfold. Hopefully, that has been a successful exercise. It is an area that we have chosen to be proactive in.

3.00 pm

## Enterprise, Trade and Investment

### Invest NI: Financial Assistance

1. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that Invest NI has handed back £39.1 million over the previous two monitoring rounds, what steps are being taken to re-examine its criteria for providing financial assistance. (AQO 1590/11-15)

**Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):** The current uncertainty in global markets and challenging business conditions have resulted in many companies slowing down or deferring their investment plans in the immediate short term. That is entirely understandable and sensible, but the knock-on effect has been that support from Invest NI has not been drawn down in-year as originally intended. Invest NI is only a part funder of these projects, and I know that it has attempted, whenever possible, to work closely with affected companies to do everything possible to maximise project spend. In addition, Invest NI has sought

to mitigate the effect of the slowdown either by allocating support to new projects or by accelerating existing projects.

Recently, Invest NI launched various initiatives under the Boosting Business scheme in order to respond to the economic environment, including a fund to support business owners in creating jobs, developing skills and promoting exports. Various other measures have been introduced to respond to the harsh economic environment, including export promotion, research and development, ICT and skills support. In addition, a number of practical business seminars have been held to help companies to develop their efficiency and maximise potential opportunities.

**Mr McCallister:** I am grateful to the Minister for her reply. In my question, I was asking for some detail on whether Invest NI would re-examine its criteria for providing financial assistance. Is she confident that all that can be done is being done by Invest NI to maximise our job promotion strategy?

**Mrs Foster:** The answer to the second part of the question is yes. I am confident in that regard.

The Member will know that it is very difficult to change criteria that are regulated, as it were, by European selective financial assistance rules. We always have to be very careful that we do not breach those rules. Last year, however, in that context, we launched the Boosting Business programme, which tries to look at innovative ways of helping businesses, whether through seminars, as I mentioned in my substantive answer, through the jobs fund or, indeed, through practical advice and assistance. He will also be aware that we recently launched our access to finance strategy, which has five funds to try to help with the gaps in access to finance that have developed as a result of the actions of the banks. I very much hope that those funds will make a difference to our small and medium-sized businesses, because there is an access to finance gap, which is becoming more of a problem for us in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Givan:** Does the Minister agree that it would have been entirely reckless for Invest NI to have given out that money in the absence of other partner funders coming forward and that there is a duty on the body to ensure value for money for the taxpayer? Will she also comment on when the small business loan fund will come on stream to support those small businesses in our community?

**Mrs Foster:** We have tried to help with access to finance by having a number of schemes available, one of which is the Northern Ireland Spin Out (NISPO) fund; I always get that wrong by calling it the NIPSO fund. It has been operational since 2009 and has a total fund of £12 million. The co-investment fund, which has been operational since July 2011, has £16 million. The development fund, to which the Member referred, has £30 million of equity, and the growth loan fund has £50 million of unsecured debt. He will be aware that Braveheart Investment Group has been awarded that contract, and it is hoped that we will be able to start lending from that fund by May 2012, because I know that a lot of businesses are awaiting that.

On the question of the handing back of money, as opposed to handing it out without rules and regulations, I am quite sure that the members of the Public Accounts Committee would not want to have to call us in to look at how we had spent the money. Instead, however, Invest NI gave the money back to the centre, and that, of course, enabled the

resource to be redistributed to pressure areas, including health and education. It is important that Invest NI took those decisions promptly so that we were not left, at the end of the year, with money that we simply could not spend because of the economic circumstances in which we have found ourselves. I have no apologies to make for the way in which Invest NI has dealt with the matter. I support the way in which it has dealt with the matter. With the budgetary tightness that it finds itself in, it has to hand back money in-year and cannot hold it from year to year.

**Ms J McCann:** Go raibh maith agat. Given what the Minister said about some of the constraints when you are looking at the money going into other projects, can she give us an assurance that Invest NI could reprofile the money in other ways for job creation, such as through the jobs fund? Job creation is a very important aspect of building the economy and taking families out of poverty.

**Mrs Foster:** Indeed, that is what has happened with the Boosting Business scheme. As the Member knows, we were able to achieve £19 million for the jobs fund in the previous budgetary negotiations, and we are now able to augment that with our Boosting Business scheme, which gives practical advice. I met some companies recently that have been very complimentary about the advice and assistance that they received from Invest NI. That includes companies that, in the past, would not have been so-called Invest NI clients, such as those working in the social economy and those that are made up of one person who has felt under pressure. They have come to the focus on finance seminars and found them hugely beneficial, so that has been money well spent.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. What practical steps can be or are being taken to ensure that the underspend situation does not repeat itself, especially at a time when local businesses need all the financial assistance that they can get?

**Mrs Foster:** On the matter of the underspend being repeated, I cannot, unfortunately, predict how much money the banks will make available for match funding to companies that want to grow. That is why we have brought about the growth loan fund, which, we hope, will allow some of those companies to grow. It is anticipated that the budget adjustments that we made in 2011-12 will not, hopefully, cause budget pressure for us in 2012-13. One of our difficulties is that if we hand money back into the centre, the pressure for that money may come on us in the following year. A lot of these things have just been delayed as opposed to not happening at all, but we are content that we will be able to manage that in the coming years.

## Golf Tourism: North Down

2. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans there are to promote golf tourism in North Down, particularly with Holywood being the home of the world number one golfer, Rory McIlroy. (AQO 1591/11-15)

**Mrs Foster:** The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has been working with North Down Borough Council and, in particular, Holywood Golf Club since Rory McIlroy won the US Open last May. As a member of the Tourist Board's quality assurance golf scheme, Holywood Golf Club has the opportunity to promote the club through a range of marketing and promotional

activities nationally and internationally. A number of press familiarisation trips hosted recently by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board have included the golf club in their itineraries.

**Mr Dunne:** I thank the Minister for her answer. How does the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment plan to manage successfully the delivery of the Irish Open golf event?

**Mrs Foster:** We are all looking forward to the Irish Open golf event very much, and as you know, interest in the event is growing. We have not staged an event such as this for nearly 60 years. As a Department, we are working in partnership with our colleagues at Royal Portrush Golf Club and Coleraine Borough Council, along with other partners in the Department for Regional Development. We realise that we need to have a delivery structure in place to ensure effective co-ordination across all Departments and local authorities. Therefore, we have established a steering group of all the key organisations to deliver what, I confidently predict, will be a hugely successful event. As I said, considerable interest has been shown in sponsorship, and we will work with the European Tour to ensure that we get the most out of this for the European Tour, the golfers and, most importantly, Northern Ireland in 2012.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree with me that we should look at promoting GAA tourism, particularly hurling tourism, given that we now have some of the best hurling teams in the world in north Antrim, especially the new all-Ireland champions, Loughgiel Shamrocks —

**Mr Speaker:** Order. This is very focused on golf. *[Laughter.]* Order. Let us move on.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I guarantee a golf question. As the Minister knows, Rory McIlroy plays next at the US Masters in Augusta. Does she have any plans to use that event to begin marketing Royal Portrush as a suitable venue for one of the other three majors in professional golf?

**Mr Weir:** The US Open could be held there.

**Mrs Foster:** I do not think that the US Open is coming to Royal Portrush any time soon. It is not a question of us starting to look at the Open coming to Royal Portrush. It has always been my desire that the Irish Open is a precursor to the Open coming to Royal Portrush and I very much hope that that will happen in the coming years. We have already had a number of visits from the R&A, and when it sees the way in which we are able to run the Irish Open at the end of June, it will be only too happy to bring the Open back to Royal Portrush.

**Mr Dallat:** I am suitably entertained by both hurling and golf, so I have no axe to grind.

Minister, you have been involved in the north coast, which I am sure you agree is the centre of excellence for golf. Can you give us some indication of the level of collaboration that you have got from your Executive colleagues in ensuring that the north coast is looking its best for the forthcoming Irish Open?

**Mrs Foster:** I am pleased to report that I have had a wide range of Executive co-operation on the matter, not least from the Minister from the Member's party on making Portrush look as well as it should coming up to not just the Irish Open

but the range of events that will take place on the north coast. There is co-operation from the Minister for Regional Development on the transport links, which are critical and which will, I am sure, work very well. Indeed, we have been able to build a very good partnership with local government. When everybody sees the way in which we are able to deliver the Irish Open, they will very much realise that we can deliver such an event. Therefore, we should look forward to the Irish Open coming to Royal Portrush.

### Business: Finance

3. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the ability of local business to access finance. (AQO 1592/11-15)

**Mrs Foster:** Access to finance has become more difficult for local businesses over the past three or four years. National schemes, such as the enterprise finance guarantee scheme, have had less impact in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) has introduced schemes to help businesses raise additional finance for export sales. The schemes are new to Northern Ireland and will take some time to gain traction.

Invest NI has developed an access to finance strategy, which, through five equity and debt funds, should provide more than £100 million to growth-potential businesses over the next five to six years. That should ensure that high-growth-potential start-ups and growth-potential businesses are not prevented from achieving their potential due to a lack of finance. Local businesses that export or plan to export would be particularly attractive for those funds, as they will contribute most to economic growth.

**Mr Hamilton:** I thank the Minister for her answer. The Minister highlighted her Department's access to finance scheme, including the five funds. Does she agree with me that the success of the existing schemes and the demand for those new funds highlight that no matter what the banks tell us about hitting their lending targets, there remains a significant access to finance gap in Northern Ireland?

**Mrs Foster:** There is not only an access to finance gap, but, as I am sure the Member will agree, a growing credibility gap for the banks when they tell us that they are ready and willing to lend, yet, in our constituency offices, businesses and individuals tell us weekly that they cannot get finance or they are being told that their overdrafts are being withdrawn or whatever. That is why we felt that we had to intervene through the access to finance pieces of work. They are not the only things that we are doing. We are in discussions with the banks to see whether there is some way that we can help in relation to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, which is becoming more of a difficulty for a lot of small companies in the way in which they do their business.

### 3.15 pm

**Mr Flanagan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It would be wrong of me not to use this opportunity to congratulate St Michael's, Enniskillen, on their fantastic sporting victory yesterday in the MacRory Cup final.

Returning to the question, does the Minister feel that the introduction of a credit review office or agency, which would give small businesses the opportunity to appeal

unsuccessful loan applications, would prove beneficial in getting businesses more access to finance?

**Mrs Foster:** As I understand it, that is a scheme in the Republic of Ireland. Both junior Ministers have looked at that issue in the context of the economic subgroup and it is a matter that we are discussing in that group. As I understand it, there is a mechanism for people to appeal to their banks and then that is looked at by an independent panel. The Finance Minister would be able to speak about that more fully. However, I do not think that that panel has a lot of powers to do anything after the appeal is heard. The two junior Ministers have looked at it, and we are open to seeing whether there is any way in which we can put additional pressure on the banks.

I also congratulate St Michael's in Enniskillen. It would be wrong for me not to do so.

**Mrs Overend:** Given George Osborne's announcement of the national loan guarantee scheme yesterday, how will the Minister ensure that SMEs from Northern Ireland are aware of and can avail themselves of the scheme?

**Mrs Foster:** As I said in my substantive answer, UKTI has introduced schemes. We will work with UKTI. Indeed, the new chief executive of that organisation was with us in Northern Ireland just two weeks ago and he has given a commitment to work more closely with us so that we can avail ourselves of national schemes. I think it is fair to say that none of the national schemes that have been launched to date has made a huge impact in Northern Ireland, so there is a need for us to see whether there is some way that we can get more benefit from the national schemes.

### Visa Waiver Programme

4. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress has been made on a visa waiver scheme similar to that introduced by the Irish Government. (AQO 1593/11-15)

**Mrs Foster:** It is important to note that visitors from the 16 countries included in the Irish visa waiver scheme can enter Northern Ireland on a valid UK visa. I have discussed with Her Majesty's Government the potential for a reciprocal scheme whereby visitors with valid Irish visas could be permitted entry to Northern Ireland. However, security and resource implications currently prevent the introduction of such a reciprocal scheme.

**Mr Molloy:** I thank the Minister for her answer. Does the Minister accept that not having a dual system means that, particularly in relation to tourism, there are some issues that are losing out because of not being able to travel?

**Mrs Foster:** Unfortunately, the ball is really with the Irish Government because they need to come up to the appropriate level of security for the UK. Given the resource implications, at present that is not possible, but I hope that it will be possible in the coming weeks and months.

**Mr Girvan:** What work is being done to attract new routes into Belfast International Airport on the basis that if they are travelling to the international airport, they will not require a visa if they are going to stay within the United Kingdom?

**Mrs Foster:** If people have a UK visa, they will of course be able to travel not just in Northern Ireland but to the Republic of Ireland because of the visa waiver scheme. We have been working quite closely with Belfast International Airport. Obviously, we had a huge success in retaining the Continental service to Newark, which was made possible only because we were able to negotiate with Her Majesty's Government to get the power to reduce the level of air passenger duty into Northern Ireland to zero. Also, Tourism Ireland is concentrating on the Canadian route and a route into Germany. As well as that, I had some good and meaningful discussions in the Middle East when I was there a number of weeks ago. We are using the reduction of air passenger duty to zero as our door opener into a number of areas, and we will push that agenda very firmly.

### Business: Independent Retail Sector

5. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance her Department provides to the independent retail sector. (AQO 1594/11-15)

**Mrs Foster:** I fully recognise the contribution that the retail sector makes to the economy and I am always happy to meet its representatives. I met delegates from Menarys Bangor and from Bangor and Holywood town centre management in January, and, most recently — just last week — I had a useful and informative meeting with the Lisburn Road business association.

Together with Executive colleagues, I propose to carry out a comprehensive consultation with the independent retail sector to identify areas of difficulty and to develop a co-ordinated approach to help the sector to overcome those. At present, Invest NI provides a range of advisory support to businesses, including those in the retail sector. That includes information and communication technology (ICT) advice and access to the various practical initiatives under the Boosting Business campaign. Retail businesses will also be able to benefit from Invest NI's new £5 million small business loan fund, through which three- to five-year unsecured loans of up to £50,000 will be available to viable businesses in all sectors.

**Mr McDevitt:** The Minister will know from her meetings with the Lisburn Road trade association last week that the independent retail sector is in a state of considerable stress. Given its key role in sustaining communities in our cities and rural parts of Northern Ireland, can she assure us that the small business loan fund will be grown in the years ahead and that more money will be made available to businesses in the sector should they be eligible for support?

**Mrs Foster:** The small business loan fund has not yet become active; I think that July is the anticipated date. It currently has £5 million budgeted to it. If there is a need for us to revisit that amount of money, we will look at that when we see the demand. The Member will recognise — this is reflected in the fact that I intend to have a consultation with Executive colleagues and the retail sector — that the sector relies on a number of Departments to help it. That is true whether it is the Lisburn Road, Bangor, Enniskillen or wherever. I will talk to my colleagues in the Department for Social Development, the Department of Finance and Personnel and probably also the Department of the Environment. All those Departments have a role to play. We all need to get



together to recognise the value of the retail sector and to try to help it to overcome the difficulties that it faces.

**Mr I McCrea:** The Minister will be more than aware of the very strong independent retail sector in parts of my constituency, namely Magherafelt and Cookstown. Will she detail whether any of those businesses will be able to avail themselves of the jobs fund? It would certainly help businesses to sustain themselves.

**Mrs Foster:** Unfortunately, the jobs fund does not apply to the retail sector, although the Boosting Business campaign does and is there to give advice. When the Member got to his feet, I was going to say that he was “looking good, looking great”, but that, of course, is the Cookstown slogan. He would expect me to know that. A wealth of advice is available to the retail sector. The Scots have many big conversations with different sectors right across their economy, so, to borrow a line from how they do it, we want to have that big conversation with the retail sector to see what exactly we in government can do to help.

**Mr Cree:** The Minister referred to some Departments that she is working with. Will she outline how her Department is working with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) to support independent retailers that come from the creative industries category?

**Mrs Foster:** We work closely with the creative industries and with Invest Northern Ireland in particular. DCAL is about to launch its creative industries strategy, which it has been working on. I think that a lot of people in the creative industries have been waiting on that. I hope that it will give them the confidence that both Departments are working closely together. If what we are told about the Chancellor's announcement this week about TV tax relief in respect of production and television is accurate, we would very much welcome that here in Northern Ireland because we stand ready to take advantage of that tax relief and to make more and more productions here in Northern Ireland.

### **Belfast International Airport: New Routes**

6. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her Department's plans to develop Belfast International Airport's route access by connecting with key markets in Germany, Austria, the USA and Canada. (AQO 1595/11-15)

**Mrs Foster:** Convenient, competitive and direct access is essential to the development of the economy, for both tourism and foreign direct investment to Northern Ireland. My Department recently invested £1 million in Tourism Ireland's co-operative marketing activity with airlines and airports to drive demand for air services to Northern Ireland from our key overseas markets in GB, North America and mainland Europe. I have also appointed expert aviation consultants to work with my officials to advise on further actions we can take to develop air access to our key markets.

**Mr Lunn:** I thank the Minister for that answer and her answer to question 4, a few minutes ago. Does she agree with me that to encourage inward investment and tourism, her emphasis should be on improving links to the more successful economies and the affluent nations of Europe in particular: namely the countries that are mentioned in the question, plus, perhaps, Scandinavia and the Netherlands?

**Mrs Foster:** As my previous answer indicated, we are proactively looking to connect back into Canada as a priority. We have not had that link for years, and I strongly believe that it would be beneficial, in respect of not just tourism but foreign direct investment. Many of our people who work in Bombardier Shorts travel back and forth to Canada frequently, and that is just one company. Germany is one of our priority areas. Given that it is one of our tourism priorities, we need to have direct access. As well as that — I think that this follows the Member's line of questioning — we believe that we need direct access to the Middle East, moving on to the Far East and Australia.

**Mr Weir:** What level of co-operation exists between the Minister's Department and the Northern Ireland airports?

**Mrs Foster:** We have good relations with all the airports. Obviously, we want to see Belfast International Airport take advantage of the air passenger duty reduction that will happen and collaborate with us to make the most of that.

As I indicated, I had some useful meetings recently in the Gulf. One of the advantages of that was, because they do not watch 'Parliament Live' or 'Stormont Today' all the time, they were not aware of the air passenger duty reduction. However, they were interested when we told them about that and they talked to us about the area that that could open to them. We are doing some expert work in that whole area and we hope to share it with various people so that they look at Northern Ireland as a possible place to bring a direct access flight into.

**Mr McLaughlin:** In reference to the tourism product and services, does the Minister think that being able to vary the rate of VAT could be of essential significance for maximising the benefit of tourism? Is that something that she and her colleague who has just joined us — the Minister of Finance and Personnel — might consider?

**Mrs Foster:** I congratulate the Member for bringing that into a question about airports. That is not really a matter for me; it is a matter for the Minister of Finance and Personnel. I believe that I know what answer that he will give, and, in that respect, I wholeheartedly support him.

**Mr Byrne:** I congratulate the Minister on trying to improve air links with other countries. Is it a restriction that Belfast City Airport and Belfast International Airport have only road access from the city centre? Should efforts be made to approve the connectivity between the centre of Belfast and the two airports?

**Mrs Foster:** Had we an open-ended budget, that would be one of the areas that we would like to see improved. Unfortunately, we do not have an open-ended budget. Therefore, we have to deal with what is in front of us. However, it is important that we are able to signpost, are able to make sure that we have the connectivity, if not by rail then by bus and taxis, to make sure that everyone is aware of what is available to tourists when they arrive in Northern Ireland.

I commend all our taxi drivers for the marvellous work that they do to sell the Northern Ireland product. When passengers arrive in Belfast, taxi drivers give them a free guided tour of Belfast, and I commend them for that.

3.30 pm

## Finance and Personnel

**Mr Speaker:** Questions 4 and 5 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

### DFP: West Tyrone

1. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many staff employed by his Department are located in the West Tyrone constituency. (AQO 1605/11-15)

**Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):**

Currently, 80 staff employed by the Department of Finance and Personnel are located in the West Tyrone constituency, but, of course, that is not the end of the matter. Across the Northern Ireland Executive, 921 people located in the West Tyrone constituency are employed by various Departments.

**Mr McElduff:** I thank the Minister for his answer. The figure of 921 across 12 Departments might sound great, but does the Minister not accept that much more decentralisation of public sector jobs is required, particularly in areas west of the Bann, to achieve greater economic rebalancing?

**Mr Wilson:** The Member raises this question regularly. I am sure that his constituents will notice that he represents only half of the constituency, because Omagh is one half and Strabane the other. However, given his diligence on the matter, I am pleased to tell him that there are proposals that will increase the numbers employed by DFP in the Omagh area. A lateral transfer process is under way for DOE planners who have mapping/charting officer duties, and three to five of them will be located in Omagh. Also, IT Assist, along with the properties division, is looking at the availability of unoccupied office space so that people living in Omagh can operate a teleworking initiative. I am sure that the Member will be pleased that his diligence is bearing fruit.

**Mr Byrne:** Does the Minister agree that flexible working conditions for civil servants could be a contributory factor in the greater decentralisation of civil servants from Belfast? There is a lot of traffic congestion to be faced in coming into the city every morning.

**Mr Wilson:** It is one of the ways in which we are looking at how we reduce the cost of office space as well. Where flexible working conditions can be applied that suit the job and opportunities are available, we will, of course, apply them. One of the targets that we set in the Budget was to make considerable savings on the amount of property that we use to deliver some services from Departments. Where there are opportunities such as the Member has suggested, of course, we will look at them. As he will know from my answer to the previous question, we are already doing that in the case of Omagh.

**Mr I McCrea:** The Minister referred to the 921 jobs in the West Tyrone constituency. Given that Mid Ulster is a neighbouring constituency and that Omagh has a high number of public sector jobs, if the opportunity arose to move such jobs, could consideration be given to Magherafelt or Cookstown in my constituency?

**Mr Wilson:** I do not know whether the Member wants me to move the jobs from West Tyrone to Mid Ulster — we could start a turf war very easily. However, I can tell the Member that there are currently 687 public sector jobs in the Mid Ulster constituency.

I have given this answer time and again in the Assembly: in a time of economic constraint etc, we endeavour to get best value for our office estate and to have a spread of public sector workers across Northern Ireland, but that must always be set against what is economically feasible.

**Mr Cree:** The Minister will know that all politics is local. How many staff are employed by his Department in the whole of North Down?

**Mr Wilson:** The Member may well regret asking me that. When we take Belfast out of the equation, the second highest number of staff employed by DFP is in North Down. DFP employs — where are we? — 239 people in North Down. I nearly got the figure wrong, and I did not want him to come back on me about it. That is the second highest figure, once one goes outside Belfast, so the Member's constituency is well represented as far as DFP employment is concerned.

**Mr Speaker:** The Member is not in her place for question 2.

### Superannuation Bill

3. **Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the aims of the proposed Superannuation Bill. (AQO 1607/11-15)

**Mr Wilson:** The proposed Superannuation Bill has a number of aims. First of all, it is to remove the requirement whereby DFP must secure the consent of trade unions to introduce detrimental changes to the current terms of the Civil Service compensation scheme for Northern Ireland, and, secondly, it is to introduce new requirements for the Department to report on the consultation it has engaged in with trade unions with the aim of reaching agreement on detrimental changes. As a result of that consultation, the Department must lay a report before the Assembly that describes the consultation process it undertook, the proposed changes and how they would affect the reducing level of compensation payable to civil servants on redundancy. My officials are still required to consult unions with a view to reaching agreement. However, the main change will be the removal of a trade union veto where there are detrimental changes to the compensation scheme.

**Ms Ritchie:** I thank the Minister for his response. Does the Minister agree with me that it is a fundamental requirement in any collective bargaining arrangement that you have the involvement of trade unions and that the removal of trade unions from that process could be perceived as being detrimental to bringing staff and trade unions together?

**Mr Wilson:** No, that is not the case. If the Member had listened to me carefully she would have understood that all we are doing — it is a reasonable thing for any employer to do — is removing the trade union veto over any changes in the compensation scheme. The Superannuation Bill will still place a duty on the Department of Finance and Personnel to consult with a view to reaching agreement. The only difference is that, if agreement cannot be reached, the trade

unions cannot have a veto over any proposals put forward. Furthermore, the Assembly will be kept informed of those negotiations and how the Department has fulfilled that duty. We have to bring a report showing that consultation did take place, what steps were taken to try to reach agreement and whether such an agreement was reached. I do not think that that is an unfair situation. What would be unfair is for one party to have a veto over any negotiations taking place about a compensation scheme.

**Mr Weir:** I thank the Minister for his answers. What would be the implications of breaking parity with GB on this issue?

**Mr Wilson:** There would be a number of implications. We have kept parity with GB throughout the past. If we broke parity, there would, first of all, be administrative costs because parity provides the primary source of legislation. If we did not have parity, we would have to have different forms of scheme amendments and differences when it comes to communications with regard to booklets, leaflets and correspondence for staff and employers, the legal advice, the policy guidelines and the common IT system. There would be those administrative changes. Of course, there would be the cost of the actual difference in the benefits, which would have to be borne by the Northern Ireland Executive because, I suspect, if we were breaking parity it would only be because we wanted a more generous scheme, not a less generous scheme.

**Mr Allister:** Does the Minister agree that a far greater threat to parity comes from somewhere other than the Superannuation Bill — the detrimental change, suggested by the Treasury apparently, of introducing disparity in regional pay? I think he recognises the threat that that poses to future Budget income and to rebalancing our economy and building the public contribution to our economy.

**Mr Wilson:** I am glad the Member has raised that issue, because it does concern me. I do not know if that will be announced in the Budget tomorrow. It has been floated by the Treasury Ministers, and it has now been floated in the press. It is something that we knew the Treasury was looking at. I have already made a robust presentation to the Treasury Ministers on the effect of such action.

Basically, if the Government decide to do it, it will simply be a grab for cash from the regions. It will deflate the economy in so far as it will cut the spending power of those who are involved in the public sector. Some private sector organisations have said that it is a good idea, but, if they thought about it, they would realise that it is not a good idea because it impacts on the private sector and on the purchase of goods and services by the people who have their income frozen.

Of course, the other thing, which has not been mentioned so far, is that, if we decide to reduce, in real terms, the wages of people who work in the public sector, the next step, if we are not going to distort the labour market, is to have reductions in benefits as well. Otherwise, if benefits go up in line with inflation and wages are frozen, the gap will close and it will not be worth while working. The aim of the current Government is to make work pay: I cannot think of a proposal that would make work pay less than the one that is being proposed by the Treasury Ministers.

**Mr Speaker:** Questions 4 and 5 have been withdrawn.

## DFP: Revenue-raising Mechanisms

6. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the revenue-raising mechanisms currently being utilised within his Department. (AQO 1610/11-15)

**Mr Wilson:** The Department currently raises revenue through the provision of services to the public, other Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments and public bodies. Money made from services provided to the public mostly consists of fees that are charged by the General Register Office for items such as duplicate birth certificates. Land and Property Services also raises considerable revenue through land registration and the selling of maps etc. Shared services to other Departments and public bodies include IT, HR, accommodation, training, procurement and legal services.

**Mr Gardiner:** I thank the Minister for his reply. Will he advise whether his Department is selling the expertise of its economists, business consultants and the like to raise funds for his Department?

**Mr Wilson:** We are aware of opportunities to use the internal expertise that we have and sell it to other Departments, where there will be hard charging for it, or to other public bodies. I cannot say for certain that we have raised huge amounts by selling expertise to private bodies. Nevertheless, where those opportunities arise, we take them. Of the Department's budget of £275 million this year, £90 million was raised through charging for services that the Department is able to provide.

**Mr D Bradley:** How much money from asset sales has been factored into the budget? What are the sources of that money?

**Mr Wilson:** For this year, the Department has identified four particular assets that it wishes to sell. The Andersonstown jobs and benefits office was recently sold. There was a strong lobby for that sale from the Member for West Belfast Mr McCann: not only was there some financial benefit to the Department, but there was a lot of social benefit to the area, as it removed an eyesore that was causing an awful lot of difficulties for people who lived adjacent to it because of vandalism etc. We have also had an offer accepted on 1A Belt Road, Londonderry.

There are two other properties that we had listed as surplus: Northland House, Belfast, on which I had a discussion with a potential buyer just before I came in here, and the property on George Street, Ballymena. However, both of those properties have been a bit more difficult to move. Given the likelihood that property prices, especially in Frederick Street, will be impacted by the University of Ulster's move to that part of north Belfast, it might well be that the Department will want to reconsider whether to sell now or wait until property values go up.

### 3.45 pm

**Mr Ross:** Did the Department identify any further revenue-raising policies during the Budget 2010 process? Does he intend to bring any of those policies forward?

**Mr Wilson:** We did. In fact, I mentioned some of those policies during the Budget debate last year, so they are probably on record in Hansard. We have a huge art collection, for example, some of which could be sold. However, I suspect that that would probably not be the best idea in

the current economic climate. I see the art guru from South Antrim shaking his head and saying that it is probably a wise decision not to try to dispose of those paintings at present. I am glad that he endorses the Department's financial wisdom on the issue. We also looked at charging district councils for valuation services, including keeping the valuation list up to date, but that would simply have involved a transfer of costs from local government to central government. The other issue that we looked at was car parking charges for civil servants. Again, it was decided that that was probably not politically opportune, especially given the freeze in public sector pay.

## EU Structural Funds

7. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions have taken place on future EU structural funds, including a Peace IV programme. (AQO 1611/11-15)

**Mr Wilson:** The European cohesion policy is a reserved matter, and UK input into the scrutiny of the draft legislation is led by the Minister of State for Business and Enterprise. My officials are engaged in discussion with UK representatives as part of that scrutiny process. Future EU programmes will depend on the EU financial framework, or budget, and draft regulations for 2014-2020 being agreed. Neither the budget nor the regulations are likely to be agreed until the end of this year.

I support the Westminster Government on this issue. They are playing a hard game and insisting that, at a time of austerity when we are making cuts across the United Kingdom, Europe gets its budget under control before we make hugely increased contributions to it. Look at the way in which the European budget is squandered at present. Top civil servants in Europe seem to think that there is no austerity, and the European Court has ruled that their pay should go up by well above the rate of inflation etc. The Westminster Government are correct in insisting on hard negotiations about what our contribution should be, especially since we are one of the biggest net contributors.

Until the budget and regulations are agreed, we will not know for certain how much money will be available for Northern Ireland or exactly what it will be spent on. However, my officials are engaged in meetings with the various stakeholders to discuss the possibilities.

**Mr Kinahan:** I thank the Minister for his very thorough answer. Are the negotiations on framework programme 8 looking at how it can be better taken up than its predecessor and whether it might include helping our towns and villages, which will need massive assistance?

**Mr Wilson:** As we are still at an early stage in agreeing what the budget contribution will even be and, therefore, how much money will be available for the various programmes, it is not possible for me to give the Member an answer on the detail of any of the programmes. The one thing that I will say is that, when it comes to devising the programmes, there will be extensive consultation, as that is the nature of this. I hope that the kind of point that the Member has made will be raised in that consultation. I represent a constituency that is very similar to his. There has been a general view that, as far as European funding and spending are concerned, there has been neglect of areas outside greater Belfast. That may be one of the things that needs

to be looked at again when we devise future spending programmes.

**Mr Craig:** What steps will the Minister take to reduce bureaucracy in the application process, as that has been a major issue in respect of delivery? Will the Minister ensure that the money is spent in Northern Ireland and not in other jurisdictions?

**Mr Wilson:** As I have said in the Assembly on many occasions, I know the impediment that bureaucracy causes for groups and businesses not only when applying for European money but in ensuring that they actually comply with the maze of bureaucracy. Sometimes, groups find that they have not complied, and they are then penalised, or we as an Assembly find that we have clawback from the European Union because the bizarre bureaucratic rules that are sometimes applied to European funding have not been properly followed.

We will, of course, look at the regulations. The new regulations will include measures to simplify the application and payment processes through harmonising the eligibility rules that cover the different funds; to allow for communication between the applicants and the European agencies to be carried out online; and to increase the scope of simplified accounting methods, which will include payments by result and flat-rate expenses. I will expect officials to engage in the discussions to ensure that those kinds of things are taken forward. Hopefully, that will help to ease the bureaucratic burden, which many groups do not wish to engage in at present.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Are discussions ongoing about how we could draw down an additional €100 million from the EU seventh framework programme over the next two years to fund research and development and to promote innovation?

**Mr Wilson:** That job is not purely down to the Department of Finance and Personnel. The Member will be well aware that we have set a target of a 20% increase in European funds to be drawn down by the Executive collectively over the period of the Programme for Government. A lot of that R&D funding will fall to and be the responsibility of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, although the Member will know that it requires co-operation between not only businesses but educational institutions. Therefore, the Department for Employment and Learning will have a role to play. Furthermore, it has to be on the basis of co-operation and partnerships with organisations in other European countries. All those things need to be put together.

The Member is probably right that we have not been as diligent in drawing down the funds as we could be. We have set ourselves a target, but how we go about implementing that target will be the responsibility, mainly, of the two Departments that I mentioned.

**Mr A Maginness:** Since 2009, the European Union has permitted funds to be drawn down in relation to energy efficiency in homes. Will the Minister ensure that, in the 2014-2020 round, energy efficiency in our homes is a priority? It would be a very useful use of those funds.

**Mr Wilson:** The Member will know how much resource the Executive have allocated to that issue. As energy prices go up in relation to —

**Mr A Maginness:** European funding.

**Mr Wilson:** Maybe the Member will let me answer. Energy prices go up, very often, as a result of directives from the EU and its obsession with CO2 emissions. Whether it is through demands that we have greater energy output from renewable sources or, as the Government at Westminster have done, we have a carbon price floor to meet European directives or the European emissions trading scheme, all that has added to electricity prices. If we foolishly follow those directives, it makes sense that we need to find ways of alleviating the fuel poverty that those directives cause. That is one of the reasons why we have sought to reduce people's energy bills by better use of energy and insulating homes. Of course, if there is funding for that, we should push for Europe to compensate us for some of the folly of the environmental policies that it has dictated and imposed on us.

### Civil Service: Equal Pay

8. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the residual equal pay issues.  
(AQO 1612/11-15)

**Mr Wilson:** The Northern Ireland equal pay settlement has been implemented in line with the terms that were agreed with the trade union, the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance, and approved by the Northern Ireland Executive. Although concern about the exclusion from the settlement has been raised on behalf of the NIO, the PSNI and former staff, I have no plans to extend the agreement to include groups of staff who have no entitlement under the terms of the scheme.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I thank the Minister for his response. Does he accept that this is a hugely sensitive and delicate matter? Is he satisfied that his Department acted as a good employer in informing retirees of their equal pay entitlement?

**Mr Wilson:** We did. The legal requirement for retirees' entitlement was that people had to be employed six months prior to the claim being put in. Anybody who had left the Civil Service before August 2008, I think it was, would not have been entitled. That is what the law says. If we were to set aside the law and simply say, "Let us open the possibility of paying those who are not legally entitled", the Member and his party would be the first to ask questions at the Public Accounts Committee on why the law was not followed on the issue. Of course, I still have to get an answer from the Members opposite, who keep raising the issue and raising false hopes on it. How far back do they intend us to go on this? Where do we have the cut-off point? Do we go right back to 1974? If so, how do we finance it?

**Lord Morrow:** Why are PSNI staff excluded from the settlement, when Policing Board staff are included?

**Mr Wilson:** I will deal with the Policing Board staff first. They were not entitled to the lump sum payments. They were paid in error on the basis of incomplete information. Later, information came to light that changed the Department's view on the entitlement, but the payments had already been made to the staff. No attempt has been made by the Policing Board to recoup that money. Let me make something clear: that payment was made in error. There was no entitlement. The Policing Board did not present all of the information at the time, and, therefore, the payment was made.

I move now to the PSNI staff. The agreement that was negotiated by Northern Ireland Civil Service staff and NIPSA, and it was agreed with NIPSA. It was for Northern Ireland Civil Service staff only. The police have money for the equal pay claim. That money was negotiated with the Treasury and sits in the police budget at present. The Police Service of Northern Ireland, which is the employer and has the pay delegation, has to show that there is an equal pay entitlement. It has not been able to do that to date, so no equal pay arrangement has been made.

I understand that a court case has been lodged with the County Court alleging a breach of contract by the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the PSNI. That will be heard towards the end of the month — on 26 or 28 March, I think. The legal opinion that I have received is that, since pay delegation was granted to the Northern Ireland pay group, including the Police Authority, in 1996 and remained in place until the devolution of justice in April 2010, there is no entitlement for police staff to have access to the Northern Ireland Civil Service equal pay settlement.

**4.00 pm**

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the House to take its ease as we move to the next item of business.

*(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy]  
in the Chair)*

## Executive Committee Business

### Budget Bill: Royal Assent

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Before we move to the next item of business, I wish to inform Members that the Budget Bill has received Royal Assent. The Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2012 became law on 20 March 2012.

*Motion made:*

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — *[Mr Principal Deputy Speaker]*

## Adjournment

### Bangor Town Centre

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes in which to speak. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members wishing to speak will have seven to eight minutes.

**Mr Dunne:** I welcome the opportunity to speak today on what is one of the most important issues in my constituency of North Down. I am delighted to have the Minister for Social Development with us to respond to the points made in the Adjournment debate.

I start by saying that Bangor has a rich and proud history. Its maritime history combined with its proud Christian heritage has helped it become the country's premier tourist destination, attracting tourists from throughout the greater Belfast area, the rest of Northern Ireland and, indeed, Scotland, the mainland and further beyond. Its Victorian architecture mixed with picturesque views and splendour overlooking the sea has appealed to many and sets Bangor aside as an ideal seaside resort.

Unfortunately, however, things have changed. Bangor has suffered many setbacks. The town is now a shadow of what it once was. The seafront has become particularly run-down, with the notorious Queen's Parade becoming, regrettably, the greatest eyesore in North Down. That area is certainly one of the greatest concerns amongst our constituents. Those of us who have canvassed in the past year would admit that that is the number one issue in our area. It is of great concern to locals that something is done and something is seen to be done to try to address the problem.

The Harbour ward of Bangor has seen a major shift of residents leaving. It hosts a high level of social deprivation, an unsettled community and quite a large number of houses in multiple occupation. That results in a lack of ownership and real commitment to the area. High vacancy rates and poor quality mean that what once were Victorian buildings are now past their economic life. They have become easy targets for vandalism and hotspots for antisocial behaviour. These problems leave many difficulties in attracting redevelopment to the Queen's Parade area.

Bangor has over 530 business premises, with 118 in the High Street area alone. The current vacancy rate is 13.7%, an increase from 12% last year. Since 2009, the town has lost 65 businesses, including some large retail multiples with up to 30 staff and other small independent businesses employing just a few members of staff.

Bangor's out-of-town shopping centres have had a major impact on the town centre. They have moved the commercial centre of the town right out to those retail centres. All major investment in retailing has been in the shopping centres and has, effectively, created a vacuum in the town centre. What is certainly perceived as a relaxed planning policy in relation to out-of-town shopping centres has allowed the creation

of many large shopping centres, including the Bloomfield development and other large out-of-town retail developments such as Springhill and the old Clandeboye site, which is now a major retail site. All of that has resulted in low footfall in the town centre and high footfall in those shopping centres.

Despite that fairly gloomy picture, much positive work has been ongoing for many years to actively promote and regenerate Bangor town centre, and North Down Borough Council has been at the forefront of those efforts. In the 1980s, the council recognised the need to try to regenerate the town and, as a result, invested in the marina, which has been very successful in its own right. One of its major aspects was to act as a catalyst for town centre investment and regeneration. Unfortunately, that has not developed in the way we would like. In many ways, it has created a great bonus to the local economy, but it still remains to be fully developed. The town centre location of the marina is a great benefit, and we want to see regeneration built around it.

Tourism continues to play a key role in our locality, and that is reinforced with North Down Borough Council's budget of £1 million to promote tourism. The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum is in the area, and we can build on that spin-off. Many major events have been promoted in Bangor, not least the BBC Proms in the Park, which was a great success, and Snow Patrol has had concerts in Ward park. In many ways, it has been described as the events capital of Northern Ireland.

The council's investment in the walled garden, which the Minister visited recently, is most impressive. We recently invested £2.6 million in the Pickie fun park, which is about to reopen. I visited it recently and was most impressed by the work that has gone on. Again, that will be a great boost to the local area.

Much work has been carried out by the council. Work on the new 50-metre pool is under way and will be finished fairly soon. The fact that we will be able to promote full competition facilities will bring in tourists and be a great bonus to the area.

The Bangor master plan, which was launched in 2011, provides a strategy and an overarching framework for regenerating Bangor town centre. It is most welcome, and Minister McCausland has shown great commitment to it. He was at its launch, and we very much commend the work done by the Department for Social Development (DSD) and its staff, particularly Damian Mulholland, who has worked excellently with the council in the development of the plan and is now working alongside us on the steering group. The master plan aims to develop a road map to help to regenerate the town centre and the implementation steering group has now been set up to develop it. It is important to have a vision to create a diverse town centre and a thriving tourist economy. In improving the town centre, we must ensure that that is implemented and delivered.

Our constituents expect action, and action is long overdue. We, as elected representatives from the North Down area, must do all that we can in the Assembly to keep the focus on the area and to ensure that central government supports local government in trying to deliver results. The local population is frustrated and worried that the town seems to be deteriorating, that confidence has gone and that things are moving backwards when they should be moving forwards.

As I mentioned, the town centre steering group is now in place. It aims to take a multi-agency approach involving all key stakeholders, including the developer for Queen's Parade, the council, local residents and businesses, and DSD, which is, of course, crucial to its success. It is vital that constructive cross-departmental work is done on this issue. The Department for Social Development must assist the developer in getting planning permission through the Department of the Environment. We urge the two agencies to work together on the planning application, which I understand will be lodged fairly soon. Another element of the work that must be completed is the acquisition of land owned by the Crown Estate, and that is an important role for the Department for Regional Development.

The Flagship shopping centre in the town centre is another area of concern. It is very much open for business and is actively canvassing new businesses despite recent setbacks. The key objectives in regeneration will be maintaining and improving accessibility and sustainable transport links and improving the environment. The proposed environmental improvement scheme in the master plan is key to trying to create the right environment for regeneration.

Another aspect of the scheme is traffic management. It is vital that the transport system in the town is right. Traffic management is so important in getting people moving. The Bangor town centre traffic scheme has never been a great success. From my years of working on the council, I know that Roads Service struggled for years with the idea of implementing the one-way system in the town. It was never felt to be an ideal solution, but Roads Service had to do something. As a result, we have what I believe to be a rather ineffective and inefficient traffic management system that needs to be revisited, revised and changed.

It is vital that we get the right infrastructure in place to attract investment and retail opportunities. We need incentives for businesses to upgrade frontages in order to improve the whole environment of the town centre. I understand that DSD will look at this further downstream, but it is important that we create the right environment in our town centre. The environmental scheme, which should come to fruition within the next two years, will certainly help, but we must do all that we can to ensure that we have the right environment for existing businesses and to attract the right type of business back into the town centre.

All in all, it is most important that we stay focused on Bangor's regeneration. Bangor has great potential, as does North Down in general. We need to actively promote our town centre, assist in any way we can and work with existing traders and the council. There is a need to re-establish Bangor as the premier, quality destination that it once was. We need to use and improve the existing assets and infrastructure. We need to make Bangor town centre a location that people want to visit, live in and work in, and we need to attract businesses to locate there.

I thank the Minister for his attendance today. I urge him to continue the work that is being done to help the regeneration of Bangor town centre and to make it a central priority in his Department.

**Dr Farry:** I almost feel like an oppressed minority in the Chamber at the moment, surrounded as I am by the massed ranks of the DUP. I congratulate Mr Dunne on securing this

debate. His election to this Assembly has opened up the wonderful new horizon of the world beyond the extremities of Holywood. I welcome the focus on Bangor town centre.

I agree, as I am sure many of my colleagues do, that North Down already has an awful lot and, moreover, has great potential. We have this bizarre contradiction in that, on the one hand, Queen's Parade has been identified as Northern Ireland's top eyesore and, on the other hand, Bangor has been named in other surveys as being among the most attractive places, if not the most attractive place, to live in all of Northern Ireland. That shows the real potential that exists in the area.

#### 4.15 pm

We have great natural assets such as Belfast lough and Bangor bay. They are natural arenas not just for water-based sports and other activities but for scenery. We have wider infrastructure for sport, including the Ballykillaire complex and the new 50-metre pool and leisure centre, which we are very much looking forward to coming on stream next year. We also have real, considerable spending power in our community, but the difficulty is that a lot of money has been leaking from North Down into other areas. We do, of course, have to take a wider Northern Ireland perspective. Nonetheless, that leakage has consequences for the fabric of Bangor town and for its retail offering. Indeed, as Mr Dunne said, we will see leakage to, and a strengthening of, out-of-town or edge-of-town retail, in which North Down has considerable strength. Again, that contrasts with what is happening in Bangor town centre.

I think that few towns in Northern Ireland have the same sheer scale of population relative to the size of the town centre as Bangor. We have a very small town centre relative to the size of the population. That issue has not quite worked itself out over the past number of decades.

Bangor and North Down have a long and proud heritage going back to early Christian times. The area was one of the real lights in the spread of Christianity around the world. Indeed, if you look at the Mappa Mundi from the 14th century, in Hereford Cathedral, you will see that Bangor is only one of four locations on the island of Ireland that is mentioned. In later Victorian times, we, of course, had the development of Bangor through the advent of railway, and in the latter half of the 20th century, there was real growth when a lot of people moved into Bangor and North Down from other parts of Northern Ireland.

Bangor had a great tourism tradition, and it was very much a place to go. However, times have moved on. Bangor's traditional bucket-and-spade tourism disappeared as people went overseas, and that highlights the need for the town to be reinvented. I do not think that we can turn back the clock in respect of the nature of retail, because people today want to go to shopping centres. The challenge now is to create something different in Bangor. For me, it is about tourism hospitality, which is a growth sector for the Northern Ireland economy as a whole. North Down and Bangor are well placed to take advantage of that. It is about hosting a lot more events. The concerts in Bangor over the past number of years have certainly been highlights. Bangor's ability to attract major international headliners, such as Snow Patrol and Eminem, is a real testimony to its potential.

We have an evening economy, which does not necessarily involve people downing lots of alcohol; it is much broader than that. There is potential for new offices and for people to come back to live in the town centre. It is all about increasing the throughput of people and the spin-off economic activity that will flow from that. The redevelopment of Queen's Parade is central to that, and it has long been identified as such by the council and many other stakeholders. Leaving Queen's Parade as it was in the early 1990s was never an option. Redevelopment had to take place.

There has been a lot of frustration at the lack of progress right across the town over the years. Bangor town centre obviously faces a major challenge. It has been a long and difficult journey. I have certainly been central to that journey over the years and have experienced all the ups and downs. There have been difficulties because the responsibility for urban regeneration has been spread among different bodies.

I welcome DSD's involvement and the lead that the Minister is giving. There has been difficulty with the location of the town centre; assembling the various land interests together; finding agreement among stakeholders on what to build — again, building in a town centre is always controversial — and the current underlying economic and financial conditions. However, beyond all of that, it is important that we do not lose sight of the big picture. The investment of over £100 million in Bangor town centre, if it comes to fruition, will be a major catalyst. It is not just about the mix of retail, leisure, evening economy and theatre that is there or the offices and apartments: it is about the spin-off that will flow from that. It will be about the sign of confidence that that will give in Bangor's future.

Certainly, I welcome the Minister's involvement. DSD needs to redouble its efforts. I am sure that the Minister views Bangor as his number one priority among urban regeneration projects to be taken forward and, certainly, as the one with the greatest potential. The master plan is of central importance in conjunction with what can be done with the developer for Queen's Parade. I thank Mr Dunne for securing the debate.

**Mr Easton:** I, too, welcome the Adjournment topic that was brought to the Assembly by my colleague Gordon Dunne. In some ways, it comes on the back of a debate that took place last Tuesday in North Down Borough Council, where we discussed the closure of businesses in Bangor town centre. We looked at the limited ways in which we could help that scenario.

Bangor has an awful lot going for it. Sometimes, there is maybe too much doom and gloom in our outlook. It is important that we try to promote Bangor and North Down in the most positive light. The area has major assets, such as those that my colleague mentioned, Bangor marina, the new leisure centre that will open with a 50-metre swimming pool, major concerts, the walled garden and Pickie fun park. North Down has major hotels, right up to those with five stars, to take in tourists. There are fantastic beaches, such as those at Groomsport, Ballyholme and Helen's Bay, which we maybe do not utilise. There are fantastic parks. There is also the Ulster Way at Clondeboye. When you go walking there, you see that it is underused. Not many people actually know about it. It is a fantastic place for scenery and wildlife. There are deer, red squirrels and all sorts of wonderful things that the people of North Down actually do not know about. Of



course, there is also Helen's Tower, which is seldom visited despite being on that pathway.

We all know that Northern Ireland is suffering in the recession. In many ways, we are at the mercy of whether money comes to Northern Ireland from Westminster, what is going on in Europe and the crisis in countries such as Italy, Spain, Greece and other regions, and bankers and the mess that they have made of the world economy. Certainly, money is very tight at the moment, and we need to recognise that. That is why it is important that we try to make the most of what we can in Bangor.

Certainly, with regard to Bangor seafront, a bit of a fiasco — in my own words — has been going on for at least 20 years. It had been going on for 10 years before I was elected to council in 2001. You would have thought that over 20 years, something could have been done to try to resolve the issue much sooner. Maybe too many plans were submitted over the years. Perhaps we should have stuck with the original plan, on which we had all agreed, and taken it forward. Now that we are in lean times, things are maybe not moving as quickly as we would like.

DSD's Bangor master plan is fantastic. It can take us forward positively. Certainly, I will push the Minister to try to get planning applications through as soon as possible and to take it from there. In the meantime, we need to take as many small measures as possible to help the local economy in Bangor and to improve its town centre. I know that the Assembly has done quite a bit to help businesses. Measures include the freezing of business rates and the introduction of the small business rate relief scheme, which has helped many businesses in North Down. However, we need to look at what we can do to keep the town's regeneration on track. That includes small things at a local level, such as the awarding of grants for tidying shopfronts. By making shops more attractive, we can get people into the town, build up business and get more money flowing.

We need the banks to start lending again, so that we can find more money for the Bangor master plan when it finally gets up and running. We also need to improve consumer confidence, as improving Bangor seafront will not work without consumers coming into the town to build up trade in the local shops. We have a huge job to do in trying to advertise Bangor in order to attract the people, money and investment that will make Queen's Parade a better place.

Bangor is the first town in Northern Ireland to offer free access to Wi-Fi across the board. We in North Down are the first in Northern Ireland to pilot and drive that forward. We need to make better use of the internet to promote sales, our town and our businesses so that we can develop Bangor. We also need to look at car parking issues, and under the Bangor master plan, there is huge scope for that. I encourage the Minister for Regional Development to help to promote our towns by reducing car parking charges, but that is obviously for another day and a different Minister. There is a whole raft of things that we can do to promote Bangor.

My way forward is to keep and promote what we have while trying to get the right economic packages and conditions together to make the consumer feel good. That will allow the Bangor master plan to come to fruition, and, hopefully, we can get the funding to move that forward.

**Mr Weir:** By a process of elimination, apart from the Minister, I will be the last contributor to the debate. Probably the biggest single complaint that we hear from retailers in Bangor — it is probably the biggest single problem — is the lack of footfall in the town. Starting on a slightly negative note, I, therefore, find it a little disappointing that only four of the six MLAs from North Down are here. However, I am sure there are very good reasons why our two colleagues from other parties are missing, and we look forward to hearing those in due course.

It is important to be positive, and a lot of what has been said today has been positive. There are positive aspects to Bangor, and as a lifelong Bangorian, I think that it is important that we extol its virtues. It is noticeable that almost every satisfaction survey tends to put North Down, particularly Bangor, pretty much top of the list of places to live in Northern Ireland. Indeed, in the UTV poll of the best places in Northern Ireland, North Down featured fairly heavily.

Although there are problems that I will come to, we should not fall into the trap of talking ourselves down or believing that the problems in Bangor town centre are unique. The same problems face towns and cities throughout Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. There is no doubt that other town centres have to cope with tough economic circumstances. As other Members said, some of those problems are largely outside of our control. We cannot have a great deal of say in the overall world recession, which is probably the biggest single factor.

There is a range of trends in retail, some of which we can impact on. Out-of-town shopping centres were mentioned, but probably the biggest single change in retail over the past five to 10 years has been a growth in the internet market. Indeed, if you talk to any experts in retail sales, they will tell you that over the past few years, the out-of-town shopping market has remained more or less static — it has made gains on one side and lost them on the other. Sales have tended to go down in town centres, and there has been a rapid growth in internet sales.

We are not in a position to turn that around, but we can look at where we can give particular added value to Bangor.

#### 4.30 pm

Some of the investments that have been made, largely through the council, albeit with support from Departments, have resulted in a very ambitious set of capital announcements. We are in the process, within the next year, of opening the new leisure centre, which will have the only 50-metre swimming pool in Northern Ireland and a range of other excellent facilities. That is the anchor at one end of Bangor town centre. The walled garden is already in place, and we are, within the next few weeks, to see the reopening of the refurbished, revamped and improved Pickie pool, which can operate as an anchor on the other side of Bangor.

The problems happen in some areas in the middle, however, and there is no doubt that the elephant in the room in Bangor town centre is the state of Queen's Parade and the overall appearance of the town centre. There is no doubt that a change in that situation is not going to happen overnight and there will be a limited amount that we can do, given that some of those things will be dependent on private investment. I am glad to say that the current Minister has proactively engaged with and provided a leadership role for

the Bangor master plan, and he is trying to drive forward the Queen's Parade scheme. It is important now that, having seen the arguments that there have been, even among residents, we have schemes that have got people on board, and that everyone seems to be pointing in the same direction. I look forward to the Minister helping to drive that forward.

There is a wider context in which Bangor is one of the victims of the town centres situation. I welcome, as part of the Programme for Government, the commitment to investment in town centres. That is something that DSD will drive forward. I also welcome a range of conferences that will take place in the near future across Northern Ireland, one of which I hope to see in Bangor, on how we can give added value to town centres. It is important that that has a focused outcome in which all those involved concentrate on a sense of partnership, which is the key to solving the problems of providing added value. It is about partnership between Departments, local councils and traders. It is important that we listen to the voices of traders and the local population.

There have been some good examples of joined-up thinking. Mention has already been made of the help that has been given to small businesses. Nearly 900 businesses across North Down have benefited from the small business rates relief scheme. That has put money in people's pockets and has provided a degree of practical help. There are other areas that need greater attention. It is vital that, as a key part of the master plan, DRD has a central role in the issues of roads and parking.

The issue of swifter planning has not been touched on. There is a real concern at present about the slowness of planning, particularly in the Downpatrick office. I spoke to a developer today who expressed grave concern about the length of time that it would take to simply get a change of use for a major development that could happen in North Down. The concern is that the length of delay from the Downpatrick office will cause the developer to go elsewhere rather than on the main street in Bangor.

It is about providing a degree of joined-up government and looking forward with positive solutions. The commitment given last week by North Down Borough Council to spend the capital money on the free Wi-Fi scheme for Bangor town centre shows its innovation. It is about building on North Down as being the events capital and the maritime capital of Northern Ireland, and building on those additional qualities, be it the cafe culture that, hopefully, we can further develop in North Down, or ensuring that there is an artistic and cultural side of things. It may well be about providing something that is unique in Northern Ireland and has a unique selling point. There is no single solution that will improve things for Bangor; it is about a cocktail of measures.

I am sure that all of us, as MLAs for North Down, or at least those of us who are here for the debate, look forward to the Minister's reply and to working, particularly with DSD in the very positive way that it has embraced trying to improve things for the people of Bangor. I have confidence that despite the current problems, which have largely been created by the recession, in the long run, there is a brighter future for the centre of Bangor. All of us look to embrace that.

**Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):**

I thank Mr Dunne for giving me the opportunity to discuss

the regeneration of Bangor, and I thank the other Members who spoke for their contributions. It is clear from all their comments that they appreciate the value of regeneration work to our towns, cities and communities. One of the Northern Ireland Executive's top priorities is to develop business and to grow the economy, and as Minister for Social Development, I am committed to focusing urban regeneration to help to deliver that priority.

Urban regeneration is important to our economic development because town centres are vital to economic life in Northern Ireland. I do not need to tell any of you how important towns such as Bangor are to economic activity, jobs and in providing services for our community. I am fully aware that traders across all our towns and cities are finding trading conditions very challenging as a result of the current economic recession. It is very disappointing and, indeed, worrying when you hear that shops and businesses are closing because that has a direct impact on the vitality of town centres.

Bangor was always renowned as a thriving holiday destination, drawing visitors from across Northern Ireland and much further afield, especially Scotland. Unfortunately, the seafront and promenade area have not developed in recent years, resulting in a steady decline in the number of visitors to the town. Therefore, my Department is committed to working in partnership with everyone that has an interest in Bangor to make it a thriving tourist destination once again. You will be aware that I have invited Mary Portas to Northern Ireland to see how we can learn more about the measures that are needed to reinvigorate and revitalise our town centres. Bangor is one of the towns that I plan to discuss with her.

Across Northern Ireland, I have been keen to encourage investment in our towns to provide attractive, shared spaces that residents and visitors can enjoy and to support local trade and enterprise. With that in mind, I published a master plan for the town centre in July last year. The master plan was developed following extensive consultation with public bodies, business representatives and the local communities. The plan is now widely accepted as the blueprint for the future development of the town centre, and I welcome the fact that North Down Borough Council has established an implementation board to take forward the many actions that are set out in the master plan. My Department will do all that it can to support the council in this work.

You only have to look at some of the planned investments to see that Bangor is indeed a forward-thinking town and that there is a genuine commitment to make it one of the premier destinations in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The opening of Pickie fun park demonstrates the council's commitment to the town centre. Construction work on the new world-class swimming and sporting facility is in full swing, which demonstrates the Northern Ireland Executive's commitment to Bangor. Undoubtedly, that magnificent sporting facility will bring more people to the town.

I must emphasise that regeneration succeeds best when it is based on partnership between business, government and the wider community. My Department has been working closely with the council, public bodies, the local community and the developer to take forward a major mixed-used development in the Queen's Parade area of the town centre. Redevelopment of the Queen's Parade area and the marina offer a unique opportunity to transform Bangor. Taking

forward any development, particularly one of this scale, is always challenging, especially in the current difficult economic times. However, I believe that this is the right time to plan for the future.

The scheme will lead to significant private sector investment, many new construction jobs and, once the development is complete, several hundred permanent jobs. More importantly, I believe that the high quality of the proposal will once again make Bangor a highly attractive destination for shopping and leisure activities and the envy of many other towns.

I appreciate that it will take a number of years before construction commences on the Queen's Parade area and that the town has many more immediate needs. My Department is, therefore, working with the local community, the business sector in the town and North Down Borough Council to develop a revitalisation project in the town centre. That will include shorter-term actions and measures to improve the appearance of the area and to encourage more people into the town centre.

There are many other proposals in the master plan that, if delivered, will help to sustain the current traders and encourage and stimulate new businesses. For example, my Department and North Down Borough Council have agreed to commence design work on the public realm works that were identified in the Bangor town centre master plan. My Department has included £2.5 million in its forward work programme for public realm works in the town centre during 2013-14, subject to all approvals and funding being available.

I think that the contributions that were made during the debate indicate that many Members appreciate the value of the regeneration work that DSD is carrying out in our towns, cities and communities. I will pick up on a couple of points that some Members made. There was reference to traffic. Transport and traffic issues are certainly important for the regeneration of any town centre. That is why the Department has funded a traffic study for Bangor town centre alongside the master plan. That study allows us to examine how any proposed development will affect traffic movement, and DRD has agreed to work with DSD to implement any changes that can be demonstrated to improve traffic in the area as part of the wider regeneration.

One of the representatives of the area mentioned rates and welcomed the fact that the Executive have agreed changes to rebalance the non-domestic rating system over the period of the economic downturn. The 20% small business rate relief will be provided on eligible premises with a net annual value of £5,000 to £10,000, which will roughly double the level of overall help and increase the number of recipients by around 50% under the main scheme.

Car parking was mentioned, and the work that was done on the preparation of the Bangor master plan did, indeed, include an analysis of parking provision in the town centre. Generally speaking, Bangor town centre is well served with parking spaces, and unusually for a town centre, one of the main car parks close to the centre at Queen's Parade and the seafront is free of charge. However, it is recognised that there is parking pressure in a couple of specific locations, such as close to the train station. On the basis of that analysis, the master plan includes proposals for a number of additional areas of car parking. I am also aware that there are some issues with residents' parking for people who live in or close to the town centre. That is, however, an issue for the Minister for Regional Development.

Finally, Members mentioned tourism and the many historical and cultural attractions that Bangor has. I must commend North Down Borough Council for its work in exploring the various tourist packages that might be put together and the product that might be made available there for visitors. As was said, the town has a tremendous history going back to its early Christian heritage. Indeed, it was also involved in the start of the unofficial settlement of east Ulster in 1606 before the Flight of the Earls and before the plantation of Ulster under Sir James Hamilton. So, 1606 was really the start of modern Bangor, and it has gone from strength to strength since then. I am sure that the piece of work that the council did on that and on other tourism matters to create the tourism product will certainly help to draw people into the area, and all the developments that we have been talking about through commercial support and support for the shops in the area will give those people ample opportunity, when they are there, to spend lots of money in Bangor.

*Adjourned at 4.45 pm.*



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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 26 March 2012

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

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Assembly Business

### Resignation: Mr Willie Clarke

**Mr Speaker:** Before we begin business, I advise the House that I have received a letter from Mr Willie Clarke giving me notice that he intends to resign as a Member of the Assembly with effect from 12 April 2012. We wish him well. I have notified the Chief Electoral Officer in accordance with section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

### Statutory Committee Membership

**Mr Speaker:** The first item on the Order Paper is a motion on Committee membership. As with other similar motions, this will be treated as a business motion, and therefore there will be no debate.

*Resolved:*

*That Mr Alastair Ross replace Mr Sammy Douglas as a member of the Committee for Social Development. — [Mr Weir.]*

## Ministerial Statements

### Prison Reform Programme

**Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice):** With permission, I wish to make a statement on the prison reform programme.

In my statement to the House in October last year to welcome the publication of the final report of the prison review team, I stated that the next six months would be critical to this programme of reform. I am clear that full implementation of the prison review team's recommendations will take years, rather than months, and will require change across the system of government as well as within the Prison Service. However, I believe that the progress made in the past six months proves that the change we are embarked upon is transformational in scale and nature, is being tackled with pace and vigour and is irrevocable in its outcome.

The significance of this work and the benefits that it stands to bring to the whole of society in Northern Ireland cannot be overstated. It will bring benefits not only in creating a transformed, more efficient and effective Prison Service but, more fundamentally, in helping to shape and inform the approach that our society should take to those who offend against its rules by encouraging and supporting their rehabilitation. The reform programme, properly resourced and managed, has the potential to significantly improve public safety by reducing offending and the risk of reoffending, thus easing the burden in financial and human terms that crime places on our society.

The start we have made can genuinely give confidence that my Department's response to the recommendations is positive and that the progress being made is real. I will today set out the steps that give rise to that judgement. As Members will know, I have also established an oversight group, which I chair, that will provide robust and impartial scrutiny of the performance of the reform programme as it moves forward.

The scale of change facing the Prison Service is unprecedented in its complexity as we seek to deliver transformational change against a backdrop of diminishing resources. Key to reform are the ongoing negotiations between Prison Service management and the Prison Officers' Association (POA). I pay tribute to both sides for the constructive and businesslike way that they have conducted their discussions. At the outset, I made it clear that change was not something I wanted to do to our staff but that, rather, our objective was to bring about reform working with them directly as employees and working alongside their elected

union representatives. It is, therefore, encouraging to announce today that, after several months of detailed and painstaking negotiations, the Prison Service and the POA have agreed in principle a way forward. It includes repeal of the current and long-standing framework agreement, to be replaced by a new staff deployment agreement.

On 1 April, NIPS will launch its new operating model, which will be rolled out in line with the introduction of new shift patterns over the next six months. Custody officer and offender supervisor posts will be introduced. Staff currently serving in support grades will have the opportunity to amalgamate into the custody officer role, and 200 new staff will be recruited as part of the ongoing external recruitment campaign. Staff will be appointed to those grades on new pay scales and with new terms and conditions of employment.

The current seven-tier management structure will be simplified to four tiers. That will greatly improve accountability, expand decision-taking responsibility and improve the work undertaken in the new grades. Staff throughout the service will have a clear line of progression with regard to advancement, and all staff will have the opportunity to obtain professionally recognised qualifications. Obtaining a certificate of competence and, subsequently, a licence to practise will be a requirement in order to secure continued employment, pay progression and promotion.

A new dispute resolution procedure and industrial relations procedural agreement will be implemented, supported by a new code of ethics. An updated and refreshed disciplinary procedure will also be developed and introduced by the summer of this year. As we proceed to implement change, we are committed to working towards releasing the remainder of the staff who applied for the voluntary early retirement scheme. That will, of course, take time, but I am confident that we will be able to do so.

The negotiations with unions have set the backdrop to much of the progress made in NIPS over the past six months. As is clear from the package of measures that has been agreed, much of this first phase has focused on laying the foundations for structural reform. It is equally encouraging to see the tangible benefits that this work is already bringing in transforming and modernising the way in which we manage our business. For example, the introduction of a centralised detail office has brought a greater degree of management control over the deployment of staff resources and is already improving regime delivery across all three prison sites.

Under the voluntary early retirement scheme, the first tranche of 151 staff will leave the service at the end of this month. The recruitment campaign for the new custody officer grade was launched last month, with nearly 5,000 applications received. Following a stringent and demanding selection process, the first recruits are expected to be operational by the end of this year.

Arrangements are also in place for the transfer of prison healthcare staff to the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust from next week, which will ensure, for the first time, that there is appropriate governance and accountability for the delivery of healthcare services in the custodial environment. Work is also well advanced to bring forward other major and fundamental structural change. NIPS is taking forward a number of important reviews, including reviews of catering, corporate services and corporate

governance, which are helping to shape and inform both core and non-core operational delivery. That will lead to a more efficient and cost-effective service. An infrastructure manager has been appointed, whose remit includes the development of a prison estate strategy, which I plan to publish next month, and consideration of the future of the Prison Service's data system, PRISM.

NIPS has conducted a further review of full-body imaging scanners, in line with a recommendation in the prison review team's report. On the basis of that review, I intend to initiate a pilot of full-body imaging scanners as soon as the necessary authorisation for use of that technology in prisons is obtained.

NIPS has also been addressing concerns about equality and diversity reporting and has strengthened the role of equality and diversity committees in prisons.

The review team's report was clear about the need to invest in the development of staff remaining in the Prison Service: a staying-on package, as Dame Anne Owers called it. Considerable progress is being made on developing our staff and preparing them for the challenges of working in a prison service with a changed focus, which will also underpin the much needed cultural reform called for by the review team.

Plans are well advanced for a new comprehensive training programme, leading to the award of a certificate of competence, that will upskill and develop custody officers to enable them to carry out their role competently and effectively. Similarly, a learning and development programme for offender supervisors is under development, which will lead to the award of a professional licence to practice. That will be accredited externally.

The Prison Service is also putting in place a new disciplinary system for uniformed staff that will include a new code of conduct and discipline, a new code of ethics and a new professional standards unit, which will set in place new arrangements to enable the Prison Service to better manage disciplinary cases and monitor the application of appropriate conduct standards for prison staff.

The prison review team recommended a holistic solution to reforming the entire prison system in Northern Ireland, not just the Prison Service. Work has been continuing across my Department to address the review team's recommendations, most notably those relating to juvenile offenders and sentencing policy.

There has been good progress as a result of focused work between the Prison Service and the Youth Justice Agency to ensure that under-18s are only accommodated at Hydebank Wood when absolutely necessary. That has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of juvenile inmates. As at 20 March, only three inmates at Hydebank Wood were aged under 18, although legislative changes will be needed to fully end the practice.

I launched a supervised activity order pilot scheme earlier this year in Newry. It will run for six months before being evaluated, and steps are being taken to identify and establish a further location.

My Department is in discussion with the Justice Committee on the way forward following last year's review of community sentences. I hope to announce proposals in the near future.

As the prison review team made clear, implementation of the necessary reforms cannot be delivered by my Department alone. Some of its recommendations involve a strategic realignment of the framework for tackling offending and reoffending and will require a cross-departmental response. With that in mind, I am engaged in a series of meetings with other Ministers. My Department has hosted strategic workshops to create a shared understanding of how the recommendations fit within the wider agenda of improving public safety and reducing the risk of offending and reoffending. That work is still at a fairly early stage but has led to agreement around three key themes. First, identifying and providing interventions to change the behaviours that have led to offending. Secondly, creating a prison system that is focused on enabling individuals to change as well on providing a safe, secure and humane system. Thirdly, delivering more effective outcomes through better joined-up partnership arrangements across government.

I am clear that there is still a considerable distance to be travelled, and I acknowledge the inevitability of encountering further challenges and obstacles that will need to be overcome as we move forward. However, I am confident that the journey of reform has begun, real progress is being made, and momentum is building. Although challenges remain, with the support of the Assembly, the reform process is, I believe, unstoppable.

**12.15 pm**

**Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice):**

I declare an interest: I have a family member employed in the Prison Service. First, I commend the director of human resources in the Prison Service, Ronnie Armour, and Finlay Spratt, chairman of the Prison Officers' Association, for reaching an agreement in principle. Obviously, there is more detail to be implemented, which will require more work. It would be foolhardy not to welcome the agreement that has been reached in principle.

That said, I am sure that the Minister will agree that communication with staff is fundamental to any change programme. There is concern that morale is low and communication is not being properly filtered through to rank-and-file officers. Will he assure the House that there will be proper communication, particularly to those involved in the exit scheme? The Minister said that he is confident that he will be able to allow all those who wish to leave to do so. Finally, will the Minister also assure the House on an issue that has been touched on previously and that concerns the bumpy road that we are travelling on? Will he assure the House that the uniforms that will be issued to new officers and offender supervisors will be of the same standard as those that are currently issued to staff and that any change that may be talked about will first require discussion and approval at the Executive?

**Mr Ford:** I thank the Committee Chair for his welcome. I have no problem at all in joining him in commending Ronnie Armour and Finlay Spratt for the positive and constructive way in which management and the POA have engaged in recent months.

The Member makes a valid point about getting communications through to rank-and-file officers. Unfortunately, when detailed negotiations are under way, it is difficult to communicate the full detail to everyone. However, I certainly trust that the

agreement, which is agreed in principle and close to absolute finalisation, will need to be communicated as speedily and effectively as possible. Prison Service management will do that.

On the Member's final point, I cannot give him any assurances on precisely what new uniforms for new officers will look like. That matter is under discussion. However, he correctly makes the point that the emblems and uniforms, as has been established in the Chamber in the past, will be controversial and will require agreement around the Executive table.

**Ms J McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, Mr Speaker. I also welcome the Minister's statement. I refer the Minister to the section about healthcare services. The Minister will be aware of the serious medical and mental health problems of Marian Price, who is being held at Hydebank women's prison. Will he authorise Mrs Price's immediate release to an outside hospital so that she can be treated for those problems?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Let us have questions to the statement. The Member is almost straying onto a different subject. If the Member can demonstrate that she is linking her question to the statement, I will be very happy to listen to her. It is really up to the Minister whether he wants to answer the question.

**Mr Ford:** I thank Ms McCann for her welcome for the statement. I can confirm that the healthcare needs of every one of our prisoners are now being managed by the South Eastern Trust, to which full responsibility will pass on 1 April. The Prison Service will take seriously any recommendations from the trust regarding the welfare and health of any prisoners.

**Mr Speaker:** I caution Members that questions need to relate to the ministerial statement.

**Mr B McCrea:** I almost get concerned that you are directing your comments to me. I will do my best to ask the Minister —

**Mr Speaker:** It is no reflection on you.

**Mr B McCrea:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I welcome the statement and acknowledge that considerable work has been done. However, I want to tease out something from the Minister. You mentioned that, as of 20 March, only three inmates at Hydebank Wood were aged under 18 and that legislative changes would be needed if you wanted to change or end the practice. What legislation would be required? Do you intend to bring forward that legislation? Do you not accept that, while the general principle of not putting people aged 18 or younger in with older inmates is a good thing, some 18-year-olds may need special circumstances?

**Mr Ford:** I thank Mr McCrea for his welcome for the statement. Today is a good news day for the Prison Service, and we should recognise that as we go into detailed questions. I thank him for recognising the work that has been done.

Not long after I became Minister, there were 20 or 21 under-18s at Hydebank Wood on different nights. I have the complete table if any Member wishes to ask me for it afterwards. That is now down to a very small number. I fully recognise that that small number includes those who require facilities other than those that can be provided in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre.

The key issue for the Assembly will be whether it wishes to legislate in the future to remove the option for Hydebank

Wood. Clearly, that can only be done if the facilities are available in Woodlands and if the Assembly wishes to legislate that way. However, I am fully conscious of points made by other Members about the necessity to remove, as far as possible, under-18s from Hydebank Wood. The historically low numbers that are there now is a sign of the good work being done by the Prison Service, alongside the Youth Justice Agency, to manage those young people better.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I thank the Minister for the statement. He referred to creating a prison system that is safe, secure and humane. Clearly, the forced strip-searching that is ongoing in Roe House is not safe, and it is certainly not humane. The Minister also referred to the further review of full-body imaging scanners. He will be aware of how emotive that subject is, not just inside the prison but outside it. Will he outline to the House a definitive time frame and target for the introduction of that mechanism? Who does he need authorisation from?

**Mr Ford:** I thank Mr Ramsey for that. He referred to the issue of full-body searching being emotive, and it certainly is. As far as I am concerned, the Prison Service in Northern Ireland, as in the other two jurisdictions in the UK, uses full-body searching, where necessary, in order to ensure the safety and security of prisoners and prison officers. It is clearly something that we wish to move away from when we can provide that security without full-body searching.

At this stage, I can give no timescale for the introduction of the technology that I wish to see piloted. However, I can give a commitment that, as soon as licensing is agreed on an application being taken forward for Holme House Prison in Yorkshire, it is my intention that Northern Ireland Prison Service will be able to make use of that technology to carry out our own pilot and to see how quickly it is possible to introduce alternatives to full-body searching. However, the necessity is to ensure the safety, security and welfare of prisoners and staff.

**Mr Dickson:** I thank the Minister for the excellent progress that has been made and for bringing us this six-month report. The Minister said in his report that it is clear that there is still a considerable distance to be travelled. What are the key milestones for the next six months?

**Mr Ford:** I tempted to look at you, Mr Speaker, and say that is not what was in the statement.

I thank my colleague for his welcome. I highlighted a number of points that will come through in the next six months, such as further issues relating to structural reforms. I have already highlighted the fact that the implementation of the healthcare changes will happen next month. I suppose that qualifies. Reviews that are under way should report back on issues such as corporate governance and learning-and-skills training. The estates review is due back in the next few weeks and will be reported on to the House as fast as possible. There are other ongoing issues relating, in particular, to the new staff coming in. None of them is likely to be operational within six months, but I believe that we will see the first new recruits in training within six months, to be operational by the end of the year. There is a lot of work going on around developing the skills of existing staff, seeing that we manage prisoners better, introducing the new staff and allowing the exit scheme to progress, which is likely to be among the key focuses of the next six months.

**Mr Weir:** I thank the Minister for his statement, and I particularly welcome the fact that there has been agreement with the POA.

Certainty is key to the implementation of the programme in terms of its working well and in respect of staff morale. The Minister said that he was working towards the release of the remainder of staff who had applied for the voluntary early retirement scheme. What is the timescale for the second tranche of the voluntary early retirement scheme? If the Minister cannot answer that today, can he indicate when he will be in a position to produce a full timetable that outlines for the remainder of staff the timings for the full roll-out of the voluntary early retirement scheme?

**Mr Ford:** I thank Mr Weir for a perfectly reasonable question. Unfortunately, it is not possible to answer it, on two basic grounds: first, the timing of exits will have to be commensurate with the timing of recruitments, to ensure that we maintain adequate staffing; secondly, part of the compensation package for officers who leave is compensation in lieu of notice. If we were to give individual officers notice, they would not be entitled to that compensation in lieu of notice. Therefore, while it is clearly unsatisfactory for some officers who would like a more specific date, it is not possible to give them specific dates. All that I can say is that we are working to ensure that we enable those who wish to leave to do so in an orderly fashion, commensurate with the needs of the service, as I highlighted.

**Mr McDevitt:** Leadership will, undoubtedly, be critical in delivering the change programme outlined in the Minister's statement. Does the Minister expect any other changes in the senior management of the Prison Service? When can we expect to have a new director for the Prison Service appointed?

**Mr Ford:** Mr McDevitt makes a reasonable point. It is certainly not my expectation, at this stage, that we will see any further significant leadership changes. The new change manager is familiarising himself and will be in post within a month or so to lead that aspect of the work. I am working with the permanent secretary of the Department to see how we can ensure replacement for the director general when Colin McConnell leaves at the end of May. I understand that the employment process for the permanent replacement, which is being led by the Civil Service Commissioners, is being fully considered this week and will result in an advert immediately after Easter. Obviously, however, there will then be questions, including things like vetting processes, about how quickly an applicant can be put in post.

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle agus buíochas don Aire as an ráiteas seo. I thank the Minister and welcome his statement. I am sure that he appreciates that such a long statement will require more than one question. I welcome the fact that the director general will be in front of the Committee on Thursday, when we will be able to tease out some of the issues.

In his concluding paragraph, the Minister said that reform should be unstoppable. I think that that is the benchmark on which all of this will be tested. It is a bit disappointing that there was no direct reference to the change management team in the statement. Can the Minister outline what role it will play in ensuring that reform is unstoppable?

**Mr Ford:** I thank Mr McCartney for his question. It is sometimes easy to overpersonalise things. Although I have certainly paid tribute to Colin McConnell and his work and



will continue to do so, we will have the replacement change manager in post soon, as I have just said to Mr McDevitt. We are working on the replacement for Colin McConnell, and, as has been highlighted over the issue of negotiations with the POA, for example, Ronnie Armour has played a very significant role in that, as the appropriate director in the Prison Service.

We need to recognise the work that is being done by the team as a whole and not simply personalise it to one individual or another. It is my hope that we will soon have in place the full team that will continue the good work that has been done over the past six months. I said that the momentum was building and was unstoppable, and I believe that that is because of the good work I see being done by the Prison Service management — not by just one person, but the whole team.

**Lord Morrow:** I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. We speak here of offenders, rather than criminals; we must never forget the type of people for whom we are reforming. As he takes the reform package forward, does the Minister accept that keeping the outside population, never mind the prison population, on board is of vital importance? Does he accept that there is a lot of dissatisfaction, for instance, in the Prison Service itself, and that it appears to some that there is a lot of contradiction in the manner in which this is being taken forward? Some prison staff who have worked there for over 30 or 40 years are being told that they will not qualify or will not be able to pick up on the new regime and will have to wait longer. Does he accept that those people need to be shown respect and that those who want to leave the service can do so with dignity?

### 12.30 pm

**Mr Ford:** I thank Lord Morrow for his comments on that. However, I thought that that was the entire intention of the package; that those who wish to leave are being allowed to leave with dignity. Clearly not everyone can leave on 31 March, but the documentation that individuals were supplied with made it clear that release will be on the basis of the needs of the service. I accept that some individuals who had hoped to leave early are disappointed that they cannot leave in the first tranche. However, if they had read the paperwork, they would have known that that was never going to be possible. As I have said, I believe it is important that we provide the best possible information to all members of staff and ensure that the work is done as speedily and efficiently as possible. However, that cannot simply mean that everybody goes on the exact date of their choosing.

**Mr Kinahan:** I, too, welcome today's statement. On page 5, paragraph 2, we hear about a new disciplinary procedure. The Minister is probably aware that I have been asking questions of all Departments on the number of disciplinary matters, to which his Department declined to answer. Yet I am told that there are possibly many more there than in any other Department. I am told that there is, therefore, quite a lot of disquiet. Will the Minister ensure that rank and file members of the Prison Service are able to be consulted about the new code of conduct and discipline without any pressure from above or the outside?

**Mr Ford:** I have to emphasise that management have a responsibility to manage. The new disciplinary procedures have been part of the ongoing discussions between the

POA and Prison Service management. I think that that is recognition of the valid role that employees have, while recognising also that difficulties have arisen in the past in the Prison Service because management have not been able to manage properly. I am determined to see that, working with our employees, we get a better system for the future.

**Mr Lynch:** Go raibh maith agat a Cheann Comhairle agus gabhaim buíochas leat as an ráiteas sin a Aire. Did the Minister receive legal advice on the conditions that can be attached to enhance severance packages for prison officers? Did he read the advice or did he rely on submissions from officials?

**Mr Ford:** I did not personally read legal advice on issues of the severance package. I think it entirely reasonable that, at times, Ministers read the submissions that they receive from officials. If the point Mr Lynch is making is about the potential re-engagement of prison officers, I can give him the news that of the 4,900 applications received by the Department for the new custody officer posts, one came from a serving prison officer.

**Mr McCarthy:** I also welcome the statement from the Minister. I refer to the last paragraph, in which he said: "the journey ... has begun." I pay tribute to the efforts of the Minister and his Department for where we have come to along that journey. Will he tell the Assembly when he reckons that that journey will finish and we will have a Prison Service for Northern Ireland that is second to none?

**Mr Ford:** I thank Mr McCarthy for his point. The general line is that we are talking about a reform process of something like four years. However, I made it clear when I announced the outcome of the prison review team report that the first six months would be vital. That is why I am making this statement, at a little over five months, because six months comes during the Easter holidays, to emphasise that the journey is well begun. However, there will be a lot more work to do on the way.

I probably should tell the House that, a few weeks ago, I met my predecessor with responsibility for prisons, Paul Goggins, in Westminster. He told me that prison reform was one of the issues that direct rule left to devolution because it was thought to be too difficult. It is a tribute to those doing the work in the Prison Service, and to the collective way in which this House and the Department have worked alongside the Committee and others, that they have been able to tackle an issue that was too difficult for direct rule. That is an indication of the good progress being made.

**Mr Allister:** Will the Minister give some clarification on the issue of uniform? If a new uniform is thought necessary, why is that? Can he give an assurance, in light of past controversy, that there is no proposal within the Prison Service to remove HMP or the crown from the uniform? If there is no agreement in the Executive on the uniform, does that mean that the existing uniform will prevail for all staff?

**Mr Ford:** Mr Speaker, I thought that I had made it clear in my first answer to Mr Givan, the Committee Chair, that the uniforms for new staff may be something different from those currently there, but we have clearly established in the Chamber in the past that the precise detail of uniform and emblems might be regarded as sufficiently controversial and, indeed, is regarded as sufficiently controversial as to require Executive approval.

**Mr A Maginness:** I thank the Minister for his previous answers. I note that the patient Mr Armour and the redoubtable Mr Spratt have eventually reached agreement in principle. You said in your statement that it is an agreement in principle. Does that mean that further details need to be agreed, because you also said that, on 1 April, the Prison Service will launch the new operating model, which will be rolled out in line with the introduction of new shift patterns over the next six months? Is there final agreement on the detail and the substance?

**Mr Ford:** I thank Mr Maginness for his positive comments. I am not quite sure whether it is purely the patient Mr Armour and the redoubtable Mr Spratt, though, perhaps, that may not be an inaccurate description of either of them. As I understand the measure of agreement that has been reached, by saying that it was "in principle", I meant it was probably not covering the full detail of the agreement. As I understand it, there are a few minor bits of fine-tuning to be worked out. However, in essence, we have an agreement between Prison Service management and the Prison Officers Association on very significant and fundamental reforms that the Prison Service will operate in the future, negotiated willingly by those two gentlemen and others over a period of months in a way that will, I believe, provide the transformational change that we all wish to see.

**Mr S Anderson:** I thank the Minister for his statement. I understand that six officers who did not meet the criteria have been allowed to leave the service in the first tranche. That, in itself, further demoralises the remaining staff when they see such discrepancies coming to light. I also understand that another 68 staff may be moving from a criteria 3 to a criteria 2 situation, which I would welcome. The remaining staff were told at a meeting in Maghaberry that they would be allowed to leave by the end of March, and the delay has totally demoralised quite a number of staff who had made arrangements to leave on 31 March. I know that the Minister has been pressed for an answer on this, but can I press him again to tell me and the House when he thinks that the staff who want to leave will be allowed to leave?

**Mr Ford:** I thank Mr Anderson for his question. I have heard from a number of quarters that staff were told that they could all go by 31 March. I can simply tell the House that that is not what has been reported to me and that that is not what is conveyed in the paperwork that was supplied to all members of staff. Realistically, when 500 staff applied for the exit scheme, I do not think that we expected that they would all be able to leave on a single day.

Mr Anderson referred to the six officers who are being allowed to go and who did not meet the criteria. I regret that that is the position. That fault arose contrary to what was said in Saturday's 'Belfast Telegraph': it arose when pension calculations were being done in DFP central pensions branch. When the Prison Service became aware of the error, arrangements were made to ensure that six other staff would be able to leave, and they were the next six who would have legitimately left. In a sense, six staff members have been advantaged but none has been disadvantaged. I have asked for all those pension calculations to be revisited to ensure that we are 100% accurate. It is deeply unfortunate that that error was made. However, it was not made by the Prison Service, and the Prison Service is seeking to remedy it as fast as can be. As I said earlier to Mr Weir, it is not possible to give a date when all staff will be able to leave,

but I am committed to ensuring that those who applied for the exit scheme will be able to leave as early as possible, commensurate with ensuring an adequate staffing regime for the Prison Service.

## **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 recent meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in aquaculture and marine sectoral format.

The meeting was held in the NSMC joint secretariat offices in Armagh on Thursday 1 March 2012. The Executive were represented by Nelson McCausland and me, and the Dublin Government were represented by the Minister of State for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Fergus O'Dowd TD. This statement has been agreed with Minister McCausland and I make it on behalf of us both.

We welcomed the recently appointed Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission chairperson, Winston Patterson, and vice chairperson, Alan McCulla, to their first NSMC meeting and received a progress report on the work of the Loughs Agency from the chairperson and chief executive, Derick Anderson. Both Minister O'Dowd and I have made visits to the Loughs Agency and have had the opportunity to meet front line staff who have experienced attacks and abuse when carrying out their enforcement duties. It was, therefore, satisfying to hear of the positive effect on the agency's field staff morale as a result of these meetings.

We were also pleased to learn that following my meeting with the Chief Constable of the PSNI and correspondence issued to an Garda Síochána Commissioner in relation to attacks on the Loughs Agency's enforcement staff and volunteer river watchers, new and more formalised lines of communication between agency officials, the PSNI and an Garda Síochána are being developed.

We welcomed the success of the agency's enforcement actions under the oyster fishing regulations, with a series of cases having a successful outcome in the courts. In 2011, agency staff dealt with 54 rod-related offences and 44 seizures. Agency protection staff also seized 161 illegal nets, 12 boats, 36 bags of oysters and two cars as well as various other items, including knives, balaclava masks and batons. Staff have dealt with 134 pollution incidents and taken 11 sets of statutory samples. Regarding environmental protection, the agency successfully convicted every individual or company that had caused a fish kill by pollution in the Foyle area in 2011.

The improvement in the oyster population of Lough Foyle was noted, and we encouraged the agency to continue to develop management strategies to consolidate and refine these improvements. We also noted the disappointing drop in sea survival of Atlantic salmon since the 1990s and welcomed the Loughs Agency's action, following extensive consultation, in issuing a declaration suspending commercial fishing in Lough Foyle and the tidal Foyle and the restriction on angling carcass tags to help to improve the survival of Atlantic salmon.

We noted that the Loughs Agency, which took a lead role alongside partners from the University of Glasgow and Queen's University Belfast, was successful in securing funding through INTERREG IVa for the integrated aquatic resource management project between the island of Ireland and Scotland, known as IBIS. The overarching aim of this project is the development of a common approach to the delivery of high-priority training, research and knowledge-sharing, supporting freshwater and marine resource management and policy, and the biodiversity that these ecosystems support. The total value of the programme, which runs from August 2011 to June 2015, is approximately £8 million.

We welcomed the presentation by the Loughs Agency on the Lough Foyle oyster fishery and oyster spawning assessment. The findings and recommendations from these annual reports allow the agency to use the evidence gathered to inform its decision-making in relation to regulation, policy development and enhancement works for the fishery. We were pleased to note during the subsequent discussion that the Loughs Agency was considering the introduction of revised regulations concerning both the minimum weight and size of oysters permitted for landing in order to help ensure a sustainable oyster fishery. The oyster sector had recently raised that issue with me.

We were also pleased to learn that active consideration is being given to promoting local oysters through an oyster festival to coincide with the planned Clipper Round the World Yacht Race in the Foyle in July. We also noted the development of a bird survey protocol for Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough that will be used to inform and update the Loughs Agency's appropriate assessments as required by the EU habitats directive, which defines how Natura 2000 sites are managed and protected. The data collected will allow for informed assessments of how waterbird populations may affect or be affected by aquaculture activity in the loughs.

We heard at the meeting that the process of recruiting the third stakeholder advisory forum is progressing, and that the agency expects that advertisements inviting applications will be sent out in the near future. The advisory forum has been an important tool for engagement with the stakeholders of both the Foyle and Carlingford catchments. The recruitment of the third forum will ensure that all interested parties will be provided with the opportunity to put forward their views on areas of interest or concern.

#### 12.45 pm

We considered two recommendations concerning the Loughs Agency that arise from the St Andrews Agreement review. We agreed to refer the following recommendations for endorsement to the NSMC plenary meeting in June 2012. The first recommendation was for the Loughs Agency to establish and provide services to producer organisations for the development of marine products. The Council supported that recommendation and agreed that any legislative obstacles identified by the agency would be addressed by the two sponsor Departments. The second recommendation was for an amendment to be sought to the Magistrates' Courts rules to enable costs that are awarded to better reflect the cost of bringing prosecutions. Although any change to legislation in the North of Ireland to provide for a fixed-penalty regime is a matter for the Executive, it was agreed that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

(DARD) will keep under review the opportunity to amend the Foyle Fisheries Act 1952 to allow for a fixed-penalty regime.

We welcomed the progress on delivery of the Loughs Agency's legislation implementation plan; approved the Foyle Area (Greenbraes Fishery Angling Permits) Regulations 2012, which prescribe the fees payable to the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission for the issue of Greenbraes fishery angling permits; and noted that further regulations will require NSMC approval later in 2012.

Finally, we agreed to meet again in aquaculture and marine sectoral format in June or July 2012. Go raibh míle maith agat.

**Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development):** I thank the Minister for her statement this afternoon. She referred to the attacks and abuse experienced by front line staff in the Loughs Agency. She mentioned that lines of communication between the Loughs Agency and the PSNI have improved. Can the Minister elaborate on what else is being done to protect staff?

With the amount of legal activity that is taking place — the seizure of 161 illegal nets, 12 boats, 36 bags of oysters, two cars and various items that include knives, balaclavas and batons — are we tackling the issue or scratching the surface?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for the question. The reason I went to meet staff is that I am genuinely concerned that they have to carry out their jobs in difficult circumstances. I am pleased to say that the level of attacks on staff has greatly decreased, but that could be due to the season that we are in. Obviously, that would have to be monitored over a longer period to see whether some headway has actually been made. As Mr Frew said, significant work has been done to seize illegal items. Now that there is improved communication between the gardaí and the PSNI, that will, obviously, help things. The fact that we have also had a number of successful prosecutions acts as a deterrent. So, collectively, all those things add up and make a difference. Staff are delighted that levels are lower than they were at this time last year. However, as I said, we will have to keep that under review.

**Mr W Clarke:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. Can she give us a flavour of the work that the Loughs Agency is doing on the marine tourism development strategy?

**Mrs O'Neill:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for his question. The agency reported at the meeting that an application for INTERREG funding has been submitted for a project that involves the development of a 200-berth marina in Warrenpoint and the first stage of a similar development in Stranraer, including a new breakwater slipway and pontoon berths. The lead partner is Newry and Mourne District Council. The agency, Warrenpoint port, Louth County Council and Dumfries and Galloway Council are the other partners.

Those facilities will form the basis for a number of interactive projects between Carlingford lough and Loch Ryan and extend the necklace of marinas from the south and south-east of the island to the extremely attractive sailing opportunities between the north and west of Scotland, its islands and coast, and the north coast of Ireland. The aim is to provide day-

sailing opportunities between the marinas and encourage visiting yachts and cruisers to explore Carlingford on their way north and, hopefully, west to the Foyle and beyond.

I hope that that gives the Member a flavour of the type of work that is being done under the marine tourism development strategy. I look forward to bringing forward many new, inventive ideas because they are constantly coming to the fore when I am out meeting groups.

**Mrs Dobson:** I also thank the Minister for her statement. The success of the Loughs Agency, with improvements reported in the oyster population in Lough Foyle, stands in stark contrast to the failure of DARD and the Department of the Environment (DOE) to protect the horse mussel in Strangford lough. Can the Minister tell the House why, in one area, her Department seems to be improving, while, in another area, it is getting it so wrong?

**Mrs O'Neill:** The issue of the horse mussel in Strangford lough is not one that is discussed at NSMC aquaculture meetings. However, I can bring the Member up to date on that issue. DOE and DARD put a position paper to Brussels, but that was rejected. Europe wants more, and we are actively working up positions on that. I am also meeting fishermen very shortly, as people's livelihoods in that area depend on pot fishing. We have to have a balanced approach and make sure that any move we make protects the interests of those fishermen and helps to restore the horse mussel. It is about having that balanced approach, and the DOE and I are actively working on that. We have a short time frame in which to convince Europe of our position.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I welcome the Minister's statement to the House. The number of incidents and threats against staff, particularly the staff of the Loughs Agency and volunteers, is very worrying. The SDLP condemns those threats. Will the Minister outline how many incidents have occurred in recent times? She mentioned that there have been some arrests. Will she detail how many arrests have been made and what help we, as Members, can give? This cannot continue to happen, and it is not reasonable to expect any staff member to work under those circumstances.

**Mrs O'Neill:** I totally agree with the Member: it is totally unreasonable for staff to go out to do their jobs every day and be under constant attack, with stones, batons and everything else thrown at them. As I said, we have made some improvements, and the fact that the level of those incidents is pretty low is encouraging. However, we have to keep the situation under control.

On the measures that we have taken, I have met the Chief Constable of the PSNI and the Minister of Justice to discuss sentencing. Sentencing is also an issue and we want it to act as a proper deterrent. A combination of those measures will help to improve the situation. As I said, those incidents are at a low level. There have been three recent prosecutions and a number of others are actively being pursued. All those things will collectively make a difference.

**Mr McCarthy:** I thank the Minister for her statement. The Minister said:

*"the agency successfully convicted every individual or company that had caused a fish kill".*

Were any of those convictions made against Northern Ireland Departments? The Minister also commented on the Loughs Agency's action in:

*"issuing a declaration suspending commercial fishing in Lough Foyle".*

There is a similarity between that action in Lough Foyle and what has happened in Strangford lough. Has there been any loss of employment as a result of that suspension?

**Mrs O'Neill:** The agency has advised that seven cases involving pollution incidents have been brought to court. I will write to the Member to clarify whether any of those prosecutions involved Departments. I can also give him details of the seven cases that were brought to court as they have been dealt with. The agency has also advised that there have been no pollution incidents that have led to any fish kills this year. That is positive.

I think that your other question was about compensation. Some compensation was awarded back in 2008 in the form of a hardship package to assist people getting out of salmon fishing. That was back in 2008 and before my time as Minister. However, that is the situation as I understand it.

**Mr T Clarke:** I also welcome the Minister's statement. Paragraph 18 of the statement refers to a recommendation to seek an amendment on the costs that are awarded. We should welcome that, and hopefully it will come forward.

I think that there may be a typing mistake in the statement as it refers to "north of Ireland legislation" rather than Northern Ireland legislation. This is the Northern Ireland Assembly. Will the Minister push forward an increase in fixed penalties to make them much harsher?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I think that it is important that penalties reflect what you are trying to do and act as a deterrent. If penalties need to be increased to do that, we will have to keep that under review. I met the Minister of Justice on the issue of fines and costs that have been awarded, and we continue to pursue that issue.

One of the recommendations that arose from the review of the St Andrews Agreement was that there should be joined-up thinking in relation to the recovery of costs and what it costs us to take cases to court. It is important that we continue to do that.

**Mr McMullan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. What specific topics will be studied in the INTERREG IBIS project?

**Mrs O'Neill:** A wide range of topics will be included, but I will highlight four of them: first, the development of science-based management strategies for the environmental and commercial sustainability of native oysters in the context of local commercial production; secondly, the investigation of blue mussel production under different management practices, and helping producers to develop points of stock audits to better manage mussel crop and increase returns; thirdly, the monitoring of salmon migration in the Foyle to aid in achieving the objectives of the water framework directive and the habitats directive by providing information for effective management; and fourthly, with eel populations in decline, the early life history of eels is poorly understood,

and the study will aim to address that issue. Those are the specific topics that the IBIS project will be involved in.

**Mr Buchanan:** I thank the Minister for her statement. How many successful convictions have there been as a result of people being taken to court for their involvement in vicious attacks on Loughs Agency staff?

**Mrs O'Neill:** There have been at least three prosecutions, and a number of cases are under appeal. We have to await the outcome of those cases. There have also been a number of seizures, as I outlined in my statement and which Paul Frew picked up on. A number of avenues are being pursued.

**Mr Kinahan:** I thank the Minister for her statement. I welcome the fact that the Loughs Agency's enforcement actions are working, and the comment that it convicted every individual. However, I still find it amazing that a meeting that calls itself an aquaculture and marine meeting does not seem to have any representation from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), DOE or even from tourism. Will the Minister try to invite people from those Departments so that the whole of the marine and aquaculture sector can be included?

**Mrs O'Neill:** The stakeholder advisory forum is a group that involves all stakeholders, whether they are on the fishing side, the angling side or are involved in tourism. It is made up of a wide range of people and it looks at all the issues around Carlingford lough and Lough Foyle. It is important that we exploit the tourism potential that exists in those areas. Some of the ideas that were discussed included having an oyster festival similar to the one that takes place in Carlingford and whether that could happen in Derry, perhaps tied in with the Clipper yacht race. A number of initiatives are being taken forward, and many stakeholders are represented on the forum.

**Ms Boyle:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. I welcome the development of a bird survey protocol for Lough Foyle and Carlingford lough. Will the Minister give us some more details of the development of the protocol?

**Mrs O'Neill:** As you said, the agency has developed a bird survey protocol, and it has started surveying in Carlingford lough. The next stage is to roll that out in Lough Foyle. That will be done, in the first instance, by a masters student through the IBIS project. The information generated by those surveys will be used to update the agency's appropriate assessments for the two sea loughs.

An appropriate assessment must be carried out before an aquaculture licence can be granted or renewed and it is required under article 6 of the EU habitats directive. The existing avian data is insufficient for use as an indicator for the interactions between water birds and aquacultural activity, so supporting data is needed to bring the aquaculture sector into compliance with the habitats directive. Additional information is needed on the distribution of water birds, with particular attention to protected species and the abundance and assemblage of water birds and their interactions with aquaculture. There is a lot of information to be gathered, but the IBIS project will be key to making sure that it is delivered.

**Lord Morrow:** The closer you look at this statement, Mr Speaker, the more alarming the whole thing becomes.

The Minister said that lines of communication are being developed between the PSNI and the Garda Síochána.

It is disappointing to discover that we are only at the development stage. We have not developed them yet, but we are trying to develop them. She then went on to tell us that 161 illegal nets were seized. How many prosecutions were there as a result of the seizure of those 161 nets? When you ask how many is every, you either get a figure of seven or a figure of three. That is very disappointing, and I am sure that the Minister will agree that she has about a million miles to go on the programme yet before we get to any degree of satisfaction. What new steps are being taken to bring those cases before the courts? She tells us that 161 illegal nets were seized. How many prosecutions have there been?

#### 1.00 pm

**Mrs O'Neill:** Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As I said, I have made it a priority, and it is a priority of Loughs Agency, to protect the staff as they are out doing their job. Absolutely everyone condemns the attacks. Previously, I have outlined the initiatives that have been put in place. Of course, there already was communication between the gardaí and the PSNI, but, with specific reference to this issue, there needed to be improved lines of communication, so I welcome the fact that some sort of more formal protocol for engaging around the specific issues of poaching in this area and protecting staff is going to happen.

As you rightly said, 161 illegal nets and 12 boats were seized. There have been 44 seizures and 54 rod-related offences. There is a list as long as your arm of seizures and prosecutions. I am quite happy to write to the Member and give him the detail of prosecutions that have been made as a result of those 161 seizures, but, as I said, there have been three successful prosecutions and a number of prosecutions are under appeal, which we will have to continue to pursue. It is important to me that the staff are protected and that we do all that we can to ensure that they are protected as they do their job.

**Mr Allister:** I will press the Minister a little further on paragraph 8, where we read of 161 illegal nets, 12 boats and two cars being seized. Was that in 2011? Are we now to understand that, in all of that, no prosecutions have been made relating to those items or that there have been three prosecutions? It has been quite confusing. The Minister has come to the House and said that she will have to write to Members, but could she not have foreseen that one of the prime questions that would be asked would be about the number of prosecutions that have been made so that we can get a handle on whether or not there has been any success in dealing with those issues?

**Mrs O'Neill:** I said that there have been three prosecutions and a number are under appeal, so that may lead to a different number. The prosecutions were for oyster fishery breaches, and we have to continue to pursue those very successfully. We have to continue to ensure that we drive out the illegal activity that is happening there, but that will take a combined effort between the PSNI, the gardaí and the Loughs Agency. The Member who spoke previously asked how many prosecutions resulted from the seizure of 161 nets. That is what I said I would write to him on, and I will do so.

**Lord Morrow:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There has been confusion right around the House about what exactly the Minister's statement is really saying. Is it in order for a Member to request at the end that the Minister place all of the information that she has alluded to in the Library so that Members have access to it?

**Mr Speaker:** I have listened to what Lord Morrow has said. It is a matter for individual Ministers how they might answer Members' questions on any statement and what they might do after making a statement to the House.

**Lord Morrow:** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Are you saying that it is order for a Member to request the information? It is a matter for the Minister whether or not he or she deigns to provide it.

**Mr Speaker:** Yes, of course. I agree with Lord Morrow that it is up to any Member to request whatever information they want from any Minister, here or anywhere else in the Assembly.

**Mr Allister:** Further to that point of order, do you agree that we are in a very unsatisfactory position? The statement and the questions on it have finished, and we have been told about three prosecutions. We were then belatedly told that they, in fact, relate to oyster fishing, and we are left in the dark about whether or not the 161 illegal net seizures resulted in any prosecutions. Is it not a most unsatisfactory situation that we have questions on the statement and still do not know those basic answers?

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the Member for his point of order. I am sure that the learned Member will know the avenues that he should travel to try to exercise his right further to get information from the Minister. The Business Office is always there to advise Members on a way forward on any issue.

I ask the House to take its ease as we move on to the Second Stage of the Superannuation Bill.

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

## Executive Committee Business

### Superannuation Bill: Second Stage

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

*That the Second Stage of the Superannuation Bill [NIA 6/11-15] be agreed.*

The object of the Bill is to amend the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 to remove the need for trade union consent to introduce detrimental changes to the current terms of the Civil Service compensation scheme for Northern Ireland and to introduce new requirements for the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) to report on the consultation it engages in with unions with an aim to reaching agreement on such changes. The Department of Finance and Personnel has authority to make and maintain pension and compensation schemes for Northern Ireland civil servants under article 3 of the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972.

The main schemes for civil servants made under the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 are the principal Civil Service pension scheme for Northern Ireland and the Civil Service compensation scheme for Northern Ireland. The Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 requires that the Department shall engage in consultation with trade unions representing civil servants on any proposed changes to the schemes. Under article 4 of the 1972 Order, the Department is also required to secure the consent of the trade unions representing civil servants for any detrimental change that would have the effect of reducing the level of benefits payable under the schemes.

The Civil Service compensation scheme for Northern Ireland determines the levels of compensation paid to members who are made voluntarily or compulsorily redundant. It should be noted that, in addition to Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) staff, a number of other public bodies are also members of the scheme.

The Northern Ireland Civil Service pension and compensation schemes operate on the basis of parity with the equivalent schemes in the home Civil Service, which are made and maintained by the Cabinet Office under the provisions of the Superannuation Act 1972, which, in Great Britain, is the equivalent of the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972. Although public service pension policy is a transferred matter, it has been a matter of practice for many decades that the schemes for civil servants in Northern Ireland have been virtually identical to their equivalents in Great Britain.

The Bill introduces amendments that have already been made to the Superannuation Act 1972 in Great Britain. Failure to maintain parity in this instance would result in civil servants in Northern Ireland who are made voluntarily or compulsorily redundant continuing to receive higher compensation payments than civil servants in Great Britain who leave in similar circumstances, which, of course, exerts additional pressures on public expenditure in Northern Ireland.

Payments in the Civil Service compensation scheme for Northern Ireland are currently determined with reference to length of service and to the age of an individual. Under the provisions, payments are generally limited to a maximum of three years' pay. A new compensation scheme for the Home Civil Service was introduced on 22 December 2010, and the maximum payable is limited to 21 months' pay for voluntary redundancy and 12 months' pay for compulsory redundancy. Those terms are considerably less generous than those currently available to Northern Ireland civil servants.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office, Francis Maude, introduced a Superannuation Bill in the House of Commons on 15 July 2010 to amend the provisions of the Superannuation Act 1972. That Bill received Royal Assent on 16 December 2010.

The Public and Commercial Services Union and the Prison Officers' Association lost a legal challenge in August 2011 against the imposition of the new Civil Service compensation scheme in the High Court.

This Bill will enable the Department of Finance and Personnel to take forward secondary legislation to realign the rules of the Civil Service compensation scheme Northern Ireland with those of the Home Civil Service scheme.

On 7 July 2011, the Executive agreed the drafting of the Superannuation Bill, and its introduction to the Assembly was agreed on 23 February 2012. My officials briefed the Finance and Personnel Committee on the Bill, and I look forward to maintaining the constructive working relationship over the coming months.

I will now turn to the Bill itself. Clause 1 removes the requirement in article 4 of the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 that the Department of Finance and Personnel must obtain consent of the Civil Service trade unions before introducing a change to the Civil Service compensation scheme Northern Ireland that would have the effect of reducing a compensation benefit that may be provided under the scheme. That is accomplished by subsection (3) of clause 1, which inserts provision that the requirements for trade union consent will not apply in the case of a compensation benefit attributable to a voluntary or compulsory redundancy, except where the case is prior to the coming into operation of the amendment.

Clause 2 inserts a requirement that, where consultation is undertaken by the Department of Finance and Personnel on the provision that would have the effect of reducing the amount of compensation payment, that consultation must be conducted with a view to reaching agreement with the trade unions consulted. Subsection (3) of clause 2 specifies that the Department of Finance and Personnel must document the consultation that has taken place and the steps taken with a view to reaching agreement on a provision that would have the effect of reducing compensation benefit made under the Civil Service compensation scheme Northern Ireland. The Department will be required to lay a report before the Assembly that provides that information and states whether such agreement has been reached before a provision comes into operation.

Clause 3 states that, in the Bill, the "1972 Order" means the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972. Clause 4 sets out the title of the Bill and the provisions for commencement. Subsection (2) provides that clause 2,

entitled "Consultation in relation to civil service compensation scheme modifications", will come into operation one month after the Bill receives Royal Assent. The provisions in clause 1 will take effect on Royal Assent.

The Bill provides for fair superannuation arrangements for civil servants in Northern Ireland, aligning with arrangements in Great Britain, addresses age discrimination and promotes prudent public expenditure. I look forward to the support of the Assembly in taking forward the proposals.

**Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for outlining the general principles of the Superannuation Bill and welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on behalf of the Committee for Finance and Personnel. As outlined by the Minister, the main provisions of the Bill are to amend the Superannuation Order 1972 by removing the requirement whereby the Department must secure the consent of trade unions to introduce detrimental changes to the current terms of the Civil Service compensation scheme and to introduce new requirements for the Department to engage with trade unions with the aim of reaching agreement on detrimental changes.

#### 1.15 pm

The Committee first heard from the Department on the proposed Bill in June 2011, following the becoming law of the Superannuation Act 2010 at Westminster. Although the policy on NICS pension and compensation arrangements is devolved, the Department has traditionally operated on the basis of parity with the Whitehall Civil Service schemes. The initial briefing on the proposed Superannuation Bill in June 2011 was provided in the context of ongoing legal proceedings that had been taken by the trade unions against the imposition of the new compensation scheme. That meant that, at that stage, the Department was in a position only to outline options for what action was required here. The legal challenges were subsequently unsuccessful, and the Executive proceeded to agree draft legislation in February 2012.

The Committee received a pre-introductory stage briefing from the Department on 7 March this year. As has already been outlined, the Superannuation Bill will provide for changes to trade union engagement and allow the Department to move to amend the Civil Service compensation scheme to align the amount of compensation that is payable to NICS staff and other members of the scheme with what is payable across the water. In other words, it caps the amount of compensation that is payable to civil servants to 12 months' pensionable pay on compulsory redundancy and 15 months' for voluntary redundancy. It should be noted that, under the current Superannuation Order 1972, such amendments to the compensation scheme can be made by DFP using subordinate legislation not subject to Assembly control.

The Committee has given initial consideration to the Bill based on the two briefings to date and has identified a number of themes and issues to be explored at Committee Stage. Members will wish to consider the Bill's general impact, including the comparative benefits that are provided under the current scheme compared with the new scheme. The Committee will hear from a panel of trade union representatives at its meeting tomorrow, which will be the

first opportunity to hear the views of the main stakeholders affected by the Bill. The Department has informed the Committee that the trade unions have been consulted and informed of the proposed changes, but they have not yet formally responded. It is important, therefore, that the Committee engage fully with the trade unions on the Bill.

The Committee will also wish to consider the overall consequences of the detrimental changes that the Bill will introduce to the compensation scheme. It will be important to consider, for example, the relative pay in the public and private sectors as a factor in introducing any detrimental changes. The Committee hopes to hear from a number of stakeholders in that regard.

In addition, the Committee wishes to explore further the assumption that parity must be maintained. The Minister outlined the reasons for maintaining parity in response to a recent question for oral answer, and the Department has also briefed the Committee on the perceived benefits of parity. The arguments for maintaining parity are largely based around the costs involved in providing more favourable benefits under the scheme locally and the associated administration costs of departing from the Whitehall Civil Service, such as the argument for establishing our own IT systems. The Committee has sought further information from the Department on the costs of departing from parity to inform its consideration of the issue.

As I already mentioned, amendments to the scheme can be made by DFP outside of the normal Assembly procedures for subordinate legislation. There is therefore a question over whether appropriate protections are in place for scheme amendments, given that the Bill removes the need for trade union consent. The Committee has queried with the Department whether the 1972 Order could be amended to require amendments to the scheme to be subject to Assembly control. The Department has confirmed that it would be possible to provide for that in the Superannuation Bill. I expect, therefore, that the Committee will want to give further consideration to the need for more Assembly control of future subordinate legislation as part of its scrutiny of the Bill.

Members have also recognised the need to consider any possible human rights and equality implications of the Superannuation Bill, particularly to do with the special statutory requirements that exist locally. The Committee will invite evidence from the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission, and it will need to give the matter very careful scrutiny.

The Committee will take forward those issues and invite written and oral evidence from all stakeholders as the Committee Stage progresses. Given the sensitive nature of the Bill and the need for detailed consideration of its provisions, I expect that the Committee will wish to consider in due course whether it needs to request an extension of the normal time allocated to Committee Stage.

I take this opportunity to thank the Minister and his officials for facilitating the Committee's exploration of the issues to date. Members will continue that engagement during Committee Stage. Go raibh míle maith agat.

**Mr Girvan:** I speak in favour of the Superannuation Bill. The fact that we must keep parity has already been mentioned. A number of Members are aware that, last week, the Minister

talked about ensuring that Northern Ireland remained on the same Civil Service pay as areas of Great Britain.

I feel that that is the case and, as such, we should look along a similar line in relation to the costs that could ultimately be reflected on Northern Ireland and the Assembly if we break that rule at this point. I appreciate that this is one of the issues that will be brought up tomorrow, when the Committee, as was said, meets the trade unions, which may well have concerns about some aspects of how this will impact on members who are being made voluntarily or compulsorily redundant and the time factor involved in the amount of pay that they will receive. I appreciate that the Bill provides for 21 months' payment for voluntary redundancy and 12 months for the compulsory. The Chair mentioned 15 months; maybe there will be some clarification on that point, but I understand it to be 21 months for voluntary and 12 months for compulsory redundancy.

As far as the 1972 Order is concerned, I appreciate the need to look at how we use the funds that we have more proactively and ensure that we do not spend more than we have been allocated towards these types of arrangements. The Committee has already met departmental officials, and a number of our queries were addressed at that session. As it stands, I support the Second Stage of the Superannuation Bill. I appreciate that it will impact greatly on the final payment that will be received by those people who, due to the economic climate, will lose their jobs in the Civil Service. We must consider that, and, even though we say that we support the Bill, we do not want to see people losing money from redundancy payments. Unfortunately, you cannot have your cake and eat it, but we have to make these judgements, and as an Assembly we must support that.

**Mr Cree:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on important legislation that has ramifications for a significant number of people in Northern Ireland. The Finance Committee has received briefings on a number of occasions on the Superannuation Bill. In effect, the Committee has been in limbo, as the corresponding legislation that was introduced in Westminster had been subject to legal proceedings, to which our Chairman has referred. I thank the officials for keeping us apprised of the situation up to this point.

I first want to deal with the legal challenge in GB. It was brought by the Public and Commercial Services Union and the Prison Officers' Association against the changes to the Home Civil Service compensation scheme introduced as a result of the Superannuation Act 2010 at Westminster. However, the legal challenge was unsuccessful, and that has left the way open to move forward with the Superannuation Bill that is before us today, and subsequently to amend the Civil Service compensation scheme in Northern Ireland. The effect will be to bring Northern Ireland into line with what has happened in the rest of GB.

As I said at the outset, the legislation will have ramifications for a number of people in Northern Ireland. Statistics from the Department show that the Civil Service scheme, at 31 March 2011, had just over 34,000 active members and that last year, the scheme paid out more than £232 million in pensions and lump sums. Therefore, due to the sheer volume of people that the Bill affects, we approach it with sensitivity and a good deal of sympathy.



To deal with the issue in its broadest sense, the compensation scheme determines the amount of compensation and early pension benefits to be paid to staff who face voluntary or compulsory redundancy.

The key changes to the scheme include that staff leaving on voluntary redundancy will — I will say this for Mr Girvan's information — receive a maximum of 21 months' salary and those leaving through compulsory redundancy will receive a maximum of 12 months' salary. I believe that, under the current system, members are entitled to a maximum of three years' pay.

Moving on, I will look specifically at the Bill's proposals. It is a short Bill, and, as the Minister said, it contains two main clauses. Clause 1 will remove the requirement to obtain consent from the Civil Service trade unions for reductions in benefits. However, that needs to be looked at alongside clause 2, which will augment the requirement on DFP to carry out consultation with a view to reaching agreement on any reduction of a compensation benefit. Clause 2 will also introduce a requirement for DFP to produce a report on such consultations. That report must be laid before the Assembly.

Overall, I believe that clause 2 means that trade unions' views will be adequately taken into account, despite their consent not being needed. It is also clear that the Assembly can perform an important scrutiny role of any changes through consideration of the DFP report. At this stage, I am satisfied with the Bill's general principles.

The issue that lies at the heart of the debate has been rehearsed in the House many times, and that is the issue of parity. The Minister and his officials from the Department of Finance and Personnel have made the decision that now is the time to introduce legislation to ensure that parity is maintained in that area. The Ulster Unionist Party supports that decision. There is little point in going over the detrimental effects that a divergence from parity with the rest of the United Kingdom would have on Northern Ireland. During the debate on welfare reform, we heard, and will continue to hear, of the financial consequences of doing that. Suffice it to say, however, it is an important avenue that we should not, and will not, go down. The Ulster Unionist position is clear on that.

It must be noted that the Executive agreed a paper on 7 July 2011 that outlined that the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 needed to be amended. The paper also agreed to remove the need for union consent and to introduce detrimental changes to the current terms of the Civil Service compensation scheme (Northern Ireland). It also agreed to introduce requirements for DFP to report on its consultation with unions with the aim of reaching agreement on any such changes. Therefore, it is important to remember that, as it moves through the legislative process, the Bill has received the Executive's backing.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle agus tá áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht seo ar an ábhar tábhachtach seo. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I am pleased to participate in this Second Stage debate. At Second Stage, we are charged with addressing the Bill's general principles. In my view, one of its general principles revolves around how we deal with changes in transferred matters, which, in this case, means those

financial issues that affect us as a result of legislation that has been introduced in Westminster.

As several Members said, parity is at the heart of the Bill. That goes alongside the breach of the social contract between unions and government, which has been part of compensation issues for a number of years now. Traditionally, there has been a tendency to follow parity. You could say that parity is the default position here, especially when there appears to be a cost to the Executive. However, in some cases, as in this one, we are not always given the exact figures and costings that are associated with breaking parity. In the case of this Bill, we are told that departure from parity will cost us more, but we are not told how much more. We are expected to make up our minds in a vacuum, without the necessary information being available. I wonder whether that is a good way in which to proceed. I think not, especially as this is such an important issue, which, as the Member who spoke previously said, has the potential to affect the lives of so many people and their families.

### 1.30 pm

Apparently, the options were presented to the Minister and his view was that there would be a cost if we did not follow parity. We were told that there would be a cost to departmental expenditure limits and in the benefits payable to people, as well as a cost for different legislation and administration and, as the Chair of the Committee has said, for adjustments to the IT system. The question is this: how much, and could we afford the cost? Should we afford it? Without the figures, we do not know; we are in the dark. That begs the question: on what was the Minister's view based? Did he have a breakdown of the options and the costs? Did he make a decision on that basis? Or did he simply come to the conclusion, without any figures being available, that there would be a cost? Yes, there may be a cost, but let us know what it is so that we can make up our minds on the basis of fact rather than on the basis of what we think the cost might be. On some occasions, the cost might be worth paying.

Neither was the Finance and Personnel Committee presented with figures to indicate costs. There is a telling line in the evidence given to the Committee during the departmental briefing on the Bill on 7 March. An official laid out the Department's stall in relation to following or not following parity. Two issues were mentioned: the costs, for which, as I said, no figures were given, and mobility transfer across all public sector schemes. The official concluded:

*"that is a link that we and the Northern Ireland Executive have chosen to maintain."*

As I said, it is a telling remark. According to that evidence, it is not the Executive alone who have made the choice to maintain the link with parity, which, of course, is their democratic right.

**Mr Wilson:** Since the Member seems to be making such a meal of the whole issue of parity, maybe he will outline to the Assembly, just for the sake of clarity and consistency, what line the SDLP Social Development Ministers, Mr Attwood and Ms Ritchie, took when it came to welfare changes that were devised in Great Britain but had to be applied by them as Ministers. Did they not let the word "parity" slip over their lips on quite a number of occasions

in the Assembly as well? Or has the SDLP had a sudden aversion to the whole concept of parity?

**Mr D Bradley:** I thank the Minister for his question. It is a very good one, and I am eager to answer it. If the Minister casts his mind back to the Executive decisions on this particular issue, he will recall that the SDLP Minister voted against it. *[Interruption.]* On previous occasions and in other instances, he may have supported parity, but the point that I am making —

**Mr Wilson:** That is a good one. Thank you.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. Whatever your views on the pensions, you have to make your remarks through the Chair. Carry on, Mr Bradley.

**Mr D Bradley:** Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. The point that I am making is that it may be advantageous to follow parity on some or many occasions, or it may not be. However, if we are to make those decisions, we must have the information, the costings and the figures that help us make up our mind. The point I am making, and I am sure that the Minister and Chair will take note of it, is that on this particular issue, we did not have such figures and costings. I hope that that clarifies for the Minister the point that I make.

In the evidence given to the Committee, it very much appeared that this was a joint decision taken by the Executive and officials in the Department of Finance and Personnel. We have to ask who really is in control. Politicians need to show clearly that it is they who are in control.

As was mentioned, the main provisions of the Bill are to amend the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 to remove the need for union consent to introduce detrimental changes to the current terms of the Civil Service compensation scheme here and to introduce requirements for DFP to report to the Assembly on its consultations with unions with the aim of reaching agreement on any such changes.

Under the proposed changes, the maximum compensation payable under the new compensation scheme will be 21 months' salary for staff leaving on voluntary redundancy and 12 months' salary for those leaving under compulsory redundancy. There are two significant points to be noted there. The first is that there is now no requirement for agreement to be reached, just that consultation be carried out with the aim of reaching agreement. The second is that the Department and the Minister are required to report on their consultations and to lay that report before the Assembly. It is far from clear whether that gives the Assembly the opportunity to debate and vote on that report. I ask the Minister for clarity on that. Is it that a report will be laid in the Library and the Assembly will be presented with a *fait accompli*, with no power to reject the report or even to question the Minister on it, or will the report come before the Assembly in the Chamber so that Members will have the opportunity to question the Minister on it and, indeed, to vote on it? That is a very important matter and relates to the powers of the Assembly to scrutinise the work of Ministers and Departments.

If that is not the case, then this Bill presents the danger of undermining the scrutiny role of the Assembly, and we should be very unwilling to accept that. Under those circumstances, the Department and the Minister would have a free hand to change the compensation schemes at will

without any accountability to the Assembly. I am interested to hear what the Minister has to say in response to that. I draw my remarks to a close and await the Minister's response.

**Mr Dickson:** I am speaking on behalf of the Alliance Party in the absence of my colleague Mrs Cochrane, who would normally speak in such a debate, but she is travelling with the Speaker this afternoon.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Bill. Following the Superannuation Act 2010, which removed the requirement of the Superannuation Act 1972 for trade union consent to critical changes in the Home Civil Service compensation scheme in Great Britain, this Bill was crafted to complement and reflect those predetermined provisions and, significantly, to place Northern Ireland on a level playing field with regard to parity alongside our counterparts.

Taking into consideration the unpredictable and ongoing nature of the economic uncertainty facing our society, there is an evident and pressing need for us continually to revise and refine how we govern. That is equally applicable to the process that we employ in maintaining pension and compensation schemes for our public sector.

As touched on by other Members, the Bill primarily provides for amendments to the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972, with the fundamental change relating to the need for trade union engagement when making changes to the Civil Service compensation scheme. Current legislation dictates that the Department must obtain the consent of the trade unions before it can make any adverse changes to the existing scheme. Under the new proposals, the historical requirement for trade union consent will be removed, meaning that the Department will be free to proceed with changes without requiring external approval.

Our trade unions play a vital part in the representation of public sector workers, and constructive engagement should be both pursued and encouraged. Although I have concern over the removal of the trade union consent as a requirement, additional measures in the Bill seek to redress the balance and ensure that due process and credence is given to the trade union voice.

As I have said, constructive engagement with trade unions should be both pursued and encouraged. In order to appropriately and comprehensively give trade union representatives their rightful place, new requirements in the Bill call upon the Department to report on the success and nature of the consultation it engages in with the trade unions, with a view to reaching agreement suitable to all sides.

In line with the amendments, the Department is required to bring a formal report before the Assembly. I look forward with interest to the Minister's comments on how that report, which is on any proposed changes to reducing compensation levels payable to civil servants on redundancy, will be done. The introduction of such a requirement places responsibility on the Department and the Minister to be transparent and accountable in how they present information and engage in consultation.

Although the opportunity for greater consideration and scrutiny will arise when the Bill is brought before the Finance and Personnel Committee, I hope that all Members will take advantage of the time afforded to them before the Bill

reaches its next stage in this Chamber and that both the Department and the Minister will give careful consideration to any concerns raised as and when they become apparent, bearing in mind that any changes to the provisions we afford our public services will impact on the processes by which we govern. We must give due consideration to the economic climate in which we operate, and, above all, we need to be able to justify and stand by our decisions.

The proposed changes not only seek to maintain parity and ensure our public servants have equal status with their GB counterparts, but in principle seek to take account of the prevailing economic winds. It is on those grounds that the Alliance Party offers its support to the Bill at this stage.

**Mr Hilditch:** I will be brief. I support the Bill and look forward to its Committee Stage in the days ahead and the work that that will entail on what is an important piece of legislation.

Clearly, employment cultures change. More often than not, it is not just an annual salary that is taken into consideration when people set out on their careers. The overall package can be crucial, and elements within that are taken into consideration when someone sets out on a career path. Those elements are high on people's list of priorities when they are applying for work and looking at where they will be in future years. Particularly in today's economic climate, most people will look at the finer detail before taking their first step on the career ladder. Universities and colleges are training graduates and are playing an advisory role in identifying career-linked benefits.

With the parity issue in mind, I want to seek a number of assurances on some of the elements associated with the Bill as it prepares to advance to its Committee Stage, which, as the Chairperson highlighted, begins tomorrow. Will the Minister give us some detail on how any proposed new scheme would be able to protect the lower paid and limit payments to higher earners? As I stated before, the situation of the lower paid is important, so hopefully there is some protection in the scheme for them and people in that group will see that.

Given the issues that have, unfortunately, grabbed the headlines in recent times in other places, can we look at situations in any scheme where there is an opportunity for someone who has retired to regain their position in the Civil Service at a later date after a change of mind? What would happen to compensation payments when rejoining? Further to that, are there any issues there for the folk who fall into the partial retirement category? How would that impact on their situations?

With those points of clarification, I support the Second Stage of the Bill and look forward to the scrutiny at Committee level.

**Mr McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I find this a particularly difficult discussion for this Assembly, but I see it as a challenge. I very much look forward to hearing what the unions have to say tomorrow. However, I note that none of them, including NIPSA, has yet made a formal submission to the consultation. As we know, they have joined the legal challenge in London, and that reflects their general approach to negotiations. They prefer to align themselves with the direct negotiations with Treasury on pay rounds and are strongly of the view that that should be reflected in the parity application of any outcome of those negotiations. The unions may give some

steer to the Committee tomorrow, and we will certainly question them on that. However, my understanding is that, notwithstanding failure to get a positive outcome from the legal challenge, the unions have not reconsidered their traditional approach — if I might use that term — of shadowing the pay negotiations at Westminster, which, generally, are then applied directly across.

#### 1.45 pm

Clearly, the issue for the Assembly and the Executive is how we find an approach that uses the powers that we have already and that reflects the position of the unions and the situation that applies elsewhere, in a way that the public can understand.

The public sector is the mainstay of our local economy in many ways, and any detrimental effect on its spending power is a factor to be considered. My sense of the debate thus far is that we have not been provided with sufficient empirical evidence of comparisons of pay grades in the public and the private sector. People may also argue that, under the arrangements that have pertained so far, in which we shadow the Westminster pay negotiations, there is a widening gap between the public sector and the private sector here and that those arrangements contribute to the imbalance in our economy. The Committee should take a long-term perspective on that issue, with a view to achieving what has been a very consistent priority for the Assembly and its Executive since the re-establishment of the Assembly at Stormont.

We have also discovered other issues. Westminster Departments tend to operate with an even greater silo mentality than Departments here. At least here there is access to the gene pool of experience and talent and an ability to transfer between Departments to take best advantage of it. I do not speak with any authority on the extent to which that is maximised, but at least it can happen. As I understand it, one Department at Westminster could be making civil servants redundant at the same time as another is recruiting. That seems to be a very expensive and wasteful practice, both in itself and of experience gained. Our Civil Service is at least ahead on that particular curve.

There is also an issue that arises from the arrangements and packages that have been negotiated. One report that I have heard about indicates that there are up to 1,700 civil servants who are simply too expensive to make redundant. They have such packages in place that the Civil Service cannot afford to make them redundant. I ask the Minister whether that situation applies here. I am constantly bemused by the fact that we have over 200 senior civil servants in what is quite a small region. While we are having this discussion, the question pops up of why we have so many and why we do not seem to be able to do anything about the excessive numbers. That should be one of the issues that we consider when approaching the question.

At the end of the day, decisions have to be made, and the Assembly should be allowed to have buy-in. I have serious concerns that simply laying an order will affect not only the immediate implementation of the new policy but any future amendments to it. The Assembly should make its views known in respect of that very clearly to the Minister.

I understand that there is a possibility that this will be addressed, and I strongly affirm my support for that. The

Assembly should be consulted. There should be a process, and it is well within our gift of positive or negative resolution that each measure in respect of the introductory phase and any subsequent amendment to the scheme is brought back to the Assembly for consultation. That is in the interests of the Executive and the particular Minister concerned.

It is also in the interests of the Assembly to take a corporate view in addressing anomalies and inconsistencies that have developed over time or in terms of transfer from one type of government to another. This is an opportunity to put our fingerprint on it. I want to have robust engagement with the unions about the approach that they have taken up to now. There are anomalies that are not necessarily working in the broadest interests of the economy. However, their perspectives and their buy-in, if we can achieve it, are absolutely vital. Therefore, the measures of consultation in respect of the new scheme will be a crucial test, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about those points.

**Mr McQuillan:** I support the Second Stage of the Bill. The Bill will ensure parity with the rest of the United Kingdom after the passing of the Superannuation Act 2010, which removed the requirement of the Superannuation Act 1972 for trade union consent on detrimental changes to the compensation scheme for the Home Civil Service in Great Britain.

The Department of Finance and Personnel has authority under the provisions of the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 to make, maintain and amend pensions and compensation schemes for the Northern Ireland civil servants and other employments listed at schedule 1 to the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972.

The Bill removes the requirement that exists under the Superannuation Order 1972, whereby the Department of Finance and Personnel must secure the consent of trade unions to introduce detrimental changes to the Civil Service compensation scheme. Those provisions are contained in clause 1 of the Bill.

The Bill also introduces new requirements, contained in clause 2, for the Department of Finance and Personnel to report on the consultation it has engaged in with the trade unions, with the aim of reaching agreement on detrimental changes. Under the new requirement, the Department must lay a report before the Assembly describing the consultation process it has undertaken on the proposed changes that would have the effect of reducing the level of compensation payable to civil servants on redundancy. That is something that I feel is fair and more transparent, as the Department, in its consultations, will be held to account by the Assembly directly.

Recently, in the Chancellor's Budget, the idea of regional pay rates for employees of the Northern Ireland Civil Service was floated. The Finance Minister is on record as opposing such a scheme, which would not only harm employees of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and its associated agencies but would result in unequal pay scales being introduced across the United Kingdom. In my opinion, that is not in line with the principles of fairness and equality.

For that reason and for ensuring equality, I support the Bill, which would see employees here treated no differently from employees anywhere else in the United Kingdom. If the Assembly retained the Superannuation Order 1972, we would only see additional superannuation costs having to

be met by this House, meaning that the Executive would have to take money from somewhere else in order to pay for it. That is something that I cannot support. Members are, therefore, duty bound to ensure parity with the rest of the United Kingdom, as the Northern Ireland Civil Service is essentially Northern Ireland's biggest employer, and, by doing so, to protect Departments from being hit with the large compensation payouts that would result from the retention of the current consultation exercise. Therefore, I support the Second Stage of the Bill.

**Mr Allister:** The compulsion of parity means that this is largely an academic exercise, but it fills some time in the Assembly, although, judging by the interest in this debate, not a lot of time.

I am left wondering a little bit about the Minister's belief in the Bill, because I note that his colleagues voted against its parent Bill, the 2010 Bill, when it was going through Westminster. The Minister does not appear to have voted; I do not know whether that was by accident or by design. No doubt he will tell us whether he was foreseeing this day, when someone like me might get up and rebuke him for wanting to lead us in a direction he had voted against. Certainly, his party and his colleagues in Westminster voted against the Superannuation Bill of 2010, but, today, they have been professing their support and belief in this Bill, which, to all intents and purposes, is identical. I am sure that there is a very compelling explanation for that, and I am sure that, at this moment, the inventive Minister is thinking about what that is, and we will hear it in due course. It is a point that is worth noting upon, particularly since he talked to us about clarity and transparency being so important. No doubt, we will have some clarity on that issue before the debate is out.

The pretence that clause 2 will afford consultation with the unions is quite farcical, because clause 1 makes it abundantly clear that you can consult with the unions as long as you like, but they have no veto; their consent is not required. Although the Department will, doubtless, go through the motion of consultation with the unions, in parallel with what has happened in another place, the reality is that, at the end of that process, the unions will be told, "We hear what you say, but this is how it is." Clause 2 is much window dressing. As it was in the 2010 Act, so it is in the local Bill. We know much in the House about mutual vetoes and how one side can, sometimes, be forced to make a concession it does not wish to make, because if it wants progress on something else, it has to concede on that particular issue. In this case, however, there is no veto. The veto is with the Department and, therefore, the Department will simply go through the motions, hold the line and say, "There it is."

The one area that concerns me the most relates to low-paid civil servants. We are making a distinct detrimental change in reducing the level of compensation from three years to 12 months in a compulsory redundancy. I am not particularly concerned about whether our overpaid senior civil servants and their compatriots, the overpaid special breed who are called Spads, are reduced to 12 months' pay on exit, which, in the case of some Spads, might be a mere £90,000. I am not particularly concerned about them, but I am concerned about the low-paid civil servant who is earning maybe £17,000, £18,000, £20,000 or £21,000 and who, hitherto, after many years of service, could at least have

had the cushion of a significant sum of money accumulated over the three year compensation. Now, in a climate in which employment is so difficult to attain, they find that all they will have is 12 months' compensation. I suspect the Minister may well sympathise with aspects of that, but his Bill will drive that situation, if compulsory redundancies arise amongst the lower ranks of the Civil Service.

## 2.00 pm

We all recognise — at least, most of us recognise — that the primary issue here pertains to parity. It is the compulsion of parity that will propel the Bill through, drives the content of the Bill and will enforce the Bill. However, in the context of recent speculation about parity pertaining to public pay and regional diversity, the House needs to be careful about how it plays fast and loose with parity. This House, in part, and this Executive have set the scenery for interference with parity, such as could come in respect of public pay disparity, by playing fast and loose with parity. When it comes to taxation, we have no allegiance to parity. We pander, and we demand change on corporation tax. We say that parity is not for us on taxation. Do not, therefore, be surprised if, in consequence, the Treasury says that, if we are not signed up to parity on income and taxation, we should not expect it to sign up to parity on expenditure. That is a concern: this House, sowing what it sows, could yet reap, in a far more ravaging sense, the demolition of aspects of parity in respect of public pay. For me, that is a considerable concern and one that makes the price that may be paid in respect of corporation tax an even greater one than looks to be possible at this moment.

There are issues. I look at the Bill and, knowing that it will be propelled by parity through the House, wonder why we simply did not do it by a legislative consent motion. I think we all know in this House that the Bill is going through. This Bill will be signed up to because of the compulsion of parity. However, we will, no doubt, go through the motions of debating it here, debating it in Committee and, at the end of the day, doing what could have been done by a legislative consent motion.

**Mr Wilson:** I thank all the Members who have taken part in the debate. Despite the comments made by the last Member, I think that, although there have not been a huge number of Members in attendance, we have had an interesting debate with some very important points raised. I will seek to address all those points; I will not dodge any of them, including the point made by the Member for North Antrim.

I thank the Committee for the work it has done to date on this. I look forward to the work it will do at Committee Stage and the report that will come at the end of that for final debate in the Assembly.

I will deal with the general points that were made, referring to specific Members as I go. The point of clarity has already been made: for the voluntary redundancy scheme it will be 21 months, and for compulsory redundancy it will be 12 months. Indeed, the Member for North Down was trying to make me redundant — I do not know whether it was compulsory or voluntary — by answering the question that Mr Girvan raised on the issue.

A number of issues were raised about the Bill. The first was on the need for the legislation. Of course, there is the issue of parity and the fact that there will be costs associated

with the Assembly, both in the cost of the compensation payable and the cost of administration. Mr Bradley made the point that, if we are going to talk about compensation and say that there are compensation costs, the Assembly should at least have some idea of what those costs are likely to be. As I pointed out in the intervention, that doctrine was not followed by the SDLP Ministers when they were in the same position. Mr Bradley pointed out that parity might be beneficial at times. Parity was very beneficial; it was a very beneficial argument for Mr Attwood and Ms Ritchie when they wanted to dodge any questions about why the SDLP was following the benefit and welfare reform line for the rest of the United Kingdom even though it was probably against their Social Democratic and Labour Party principles. They did it on the basis of parity. I do not remember costs ever being given at that stage. Nevertheless, I will outline the calculations that we have done for the cost of not maintaining parity. Apart from the administrative changes — I have outlined the IT system, communication etc — there will be the direct costs of the differences in the compensation.

**Mr D Bradley:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Wilson:** Let me just give the figure. According to the calculations that have been done so far, under the old scheme — the scheme as it exists at present up to the three years — the cost would be £12 million if you were to make 100 staff redundant. Under the new scheme, it would cost £7 million. That is a difference of £5 million for every 100 redundancies. That is a rough calculation, and it contains a number of assumptions. However, it is a conservative value that we have attached to the parity costs.

**Mr D Bradley:** I thank the Minister for giving way. He alleges inconsistency in the SDLP's approach to parity. How does he explain his party's inconsistency on the Bill, voting against it at Westminster and promoting it here today?

**Mr Wilson:** I would have been a bit embarrassed to raise that point. If the Member is going to make a point, he should not steal it from the Member for North Antrim. I will address that point anyway, but the Member should be original in his thinking, for goodness' sake. If he is going to think of criticisms that he wants to address —

**Mr D Bradley:** Answer.

**Mr Wilson:** I am going to answer it, but I need a bit of a lead-in. Just give me the time to answer it. If the Member wants to make points, he should at least be original. He should not go around stealing points from other Members in the Assembly, for goodness' sake.

Let me address the question just in case I forget it and then find myself accused of trying to dodge the point. I thought that this point might come up, although I did not expect that so much research would have been done. However, knowing the thoroughness of the Member for North Antrim, I suppose I should have expected it. I did not vote on the issue in the House of Commons. The issue was live at that time, and it was coming to Northern Ireland, although, on other occasions it has not. As a party, we felt that there were issues that we would prefer not to see changed. There were some things in the Welfare Reform Bill that we voted against, and there have been some issues in the Budget in past years that we have voted against. Where we feel that the change can be made, we seek to make the difference

by being there and voting on the issue. However, once the issue has been decided in the House of Commons and it comes to Northern Ireland, there are times when a view has to be made on balancing whether we continue to have a different regime that is costly or, having made the arguments and lost them, we simply implement the changes here.

The view that we have taken on this one is this: yes, had there been the ability to change the view of the Government at Westminster, of course we would have done that. However, having not succeeded in that, why should we then impose unnecessary costs on ourselves? Secondly — this is important — why should we continue with a regime that leaves Northern Ireland open to legal challenges, as some Members pointed out? One reason that changes were required was that the current system relates not only to the length of service but to the age of people who are made redundant. I do not think that it would have been long before we got a challenge on the grounds of age discrimination.

There is a three-year element to the system at present, as Mr McLaughlin said. The Member for North Antrim asked how the change will impact on the lower paid: the three-year rule also made it difficult — or too expensive — to make some people in the system redundant because of the level of compensation that would be required. There are good reasons why some of the changes need to be made, including practical benefits and to avoid legal challenges.

Members spoke about how the situation had changed from unions having a veto, where there had to be agreement, to a process of consultation. I take issue with the point raised by the Member for North Antrim, who said that he felt it right for that veto to be maintained — I see that he shakes his head — and that we were doing damage by removing it.

**Mr Allister:** My point was that the Bill is disingenuous by pretending that there is a consultation process that could have an effect, when in reality it is window dressing, given that the veto rests with the Department and no veto rests with the unions.

**Mr Wilson:** Perhaps the Member has clarified his position; I thought that he was opposing that aspect of the Bill. People have asked whether the consultation is purely window dressing. They have asked what the Assembly's input will be when the consultation has taken place. Clause 2(3) of the Bill states:

*"Before the scheme comes into operation, the Department must have laid before the Assembly a report".*

First, that report must show that consultation has taken place. Secondly, it must show the steps that we are taking with a view to reaching agreement. That is the purpose of the consultation: it must be genuinely undertaken in order to reach agreement. It is not a bit of window dressing. To ascertain whether that has happened, the report must include a clear statement of the steps taken to reach agreement with the trade unions and whether such agreement has been reached. I do not accept the point that this is simply window dressing.

Another point, first raised by Mr Bradley and then reiterated by other Members, concerns the role of the Assembly. So what if the report is laid before the Assembly? What role does the Assembly then have? The report will be for information after the consultation has taken place. It is not

part of the consultation, but I do not need to preach to the Member what mechanisms are then available. Many reports are laid before the Assembly, and the Assembly has ways of dealing with them, either through Members' questions or debates in the House or by referring them to Committees. I am sure that Members will be ingenious in finding ways of ensuring that such reports, when laid before the Assembly, have an opportunity for public airing.

## 2.15 pm

**Mr D Bradley:** I thank the Minister for giving way. Considering that the changes are important and will have a serious impact on people's lives, does he not agree that the Assembly needs much more accountability on the issue? Does he not agree that, given the protection that civil servants had previously, in so far as their unions had a veto, it would be appropriate that the report comes before the Assembly in the Chamber, is open to question and, indeed, is voted on? That would afford civil servants further assurance that their rights would be protected fully.

**Mr Wilson:** I am not sure what the Member is actually asking for. Is he now saying that the Assembly should be the body that negotiates directly with trade unions about levels of compensation? If that requires Assembly support before it can go through, he would actually be putting the Assembly directly in the line of negotiation. For example, if a report comes to the House and it shows that all reasonable steps were taken to reach agreement and it was not possible to do so, is the Member saying that, despite not having been involved in any of those negotiations, Assembly Members should have the opportunity to say that they do not believe that adequate steps were taken or that they do not like the outcome and, therefore, want a different outcome? The purpose of the Bill is to ensure that there has been fair negotiation and that it has not been a case of walking in and saying, "There is the compensation scheme. Take it or leave it. Bye, bye", and walking out again. The report must show that all reasonable steps were taken. Of course, the Assembly would have concern if it were shown that reasonable steps to reach agreement were not taken. That is the Assembly's role. It is not its role to negotiate compensation levels.

**Mr D Bradley:** I thank the Minister for giving way. That is the exact point that I am making. If proper steps have not been taken to reach agreement, the Assembly has no power over it. The Assembly merely has a report laid before it. It has no power to reject that report.

**Mr Wilson:** I would have thought that we were actually giving the Assembly more input now. The Member well knows that, given the scrutiny that there would be of such a report laid before the Assembly, if it were seen that reasonable steps had not been taken, he and other Members would have lots of different opportunities, through Committees, debates on the Floor, questions to Ministers et cetera, to ensure that that point was made and highlighted. That is much more input than the Assembly has at present.

The third issue that Members raised was the protection of lower-paid staff. Mr Hilditch and Mr Allister raised that issue in their contributions. Mr Allister pointed out that, under current arrangements, those who are in the lower-paid group at least receive a maximum of 36 months' pay if they are made redundant. I noted that he took the lower, compulsory

redundancy figure of 12 months, rather than the voluntary redundancy figure, and said that, under the new scheme, the cushion is removed substantially.

I suppose that, first of all, there are two provisions. The first issue is that most redundancies that have taken place have been voluntary. I stand to be corrected, but I do not think that there have been any compulsory redundancies for a reasonable period. We are more likely, therefore, to be talking about the 21-month limit than the 12-month limit. Secondly, under the new scheme, there will be a minimum pay level for which people will be considered, which is £23,000 per year or the part-time equivalent. So, to take Mr Allister's example, someone on £17,000 a year would be treated as if they were on £23,000 a year, and, if they went for voluntary redundancy, they would get compensation of 21 months' payment. Although there is a reduction in the number of months of compensation they would receive, the uplift in pay that they would receive would mean that the compensation payable would be more or less the same under the new scheme. They would receive an uplift in pay of over 33%, and the reduction from 36 months to 21 months is just over 33%. Therefore, the compensation should not be that different, and that will protect the lower-paid. At the upper end — I think that this addresses Mr McLaughlin's point — compensation would be limited to a maximum of £149,820. Even if someone earns £160,000 a year, their compensation would be limited to that maximum. Therefore, there will be a pulling-back at the upper end of the scheme, and protection has been built in for the lower-paid. Part-time workers, who perhaps only work half a week, will receive a full-time equivalence and their compensation will be worked out on a pro rata basis.

Mr Murphy and one other Member raised the issue of human rights. That was the subject of a court challenge in England, and the court rejected the human rights argument. It did not take the view that human rights extended to a veto over any provisions or that provisions had to be continued for those who had made payments in the past.

Mr McLaughlin and Mr Murphy raised the gap between wages in the private sector and those in the public sector. Mr McLaughlin pointed out that there was a widening pay gap and asked what implications that would have for the compensation scheme. I do not want to get into a debate about the gap between private sector and public sector pay in Northern Ireland. The whole point of Arlene Foster's and the First Minister and deputy First Minister's strategy to attract investment to Northern Ireland is to get private sector wages up. It is not about bringing public sector wages down. We do not want to become a low-wage economy in Northern Ireland, and I do not want to go down the route of debating the differences between private sector and public sector pay and how that should be reflected in compensation levels.

Mr Allister and other Members raised the issue of parity. I indicated that the costs require parity, and I do not think that we have been inconsistent on that issue. There have been occasions — for example, with air passenger duty — when we said that we wanted to have control over certain tax levels to manipulate certain variables in our economy. That is not a general attack on parity itself. I have made myself unpopular with Members by saying that we have to be careful when it comes to asking for separate arrangements for Northern Ireland. However, there are occasions when that

is justified and we can show a specific, economic benefit from doing so. I do not believe that we have laid ourselves open to a charge of hypocrisy on the issue of parity.

I know that we are drawing close to Question Time. I thank the Members who took part in the debate and welcome the support that the Bill has received to date. I understand that Members have raised very genuine issues, some of which, I am sure, I have not convinced them about at this stage. However, there will be other opportunities to do that. The Bill will now proceed to Committee Stage.

The Bill is short and targeted. It is vital because it seeks to ensure that there are fair and affordable superannuation payments for members of the scheme in Northern Ireland. I commend the Bill's Second Stage to the Assembly.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** As the Minister has pointed out, Question Time begins at 2.30 pm. There have been indications that there may be a Division. I suggest that the House take its ease until then. The Question on the Second Stage of the Bill will be put directly after Question Time.

*The debate stood suspended.*

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

2.30 pm

## Oral Answers to Questions

### Environment

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Questions 2, 3 and 14 have been withdrawn.

#### Wildfires

1. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the recommendations contained in the report of the interdepartmental working group on wildfires.

(AQO 1620/11-15)

**Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):** I thank the Minister for his question, which is particularly timely, given the good weather of the past week and which is forecast for the coming week. There is a particular obligation upon all who use the countryside to ensure that there is no reckless or deliberate behaviour in the next period to ensure that last year's events are not replicated. As the Member is aware, I convened an interdepartmental group to look at the issue. It has now reported to me, and that has been useful. As a consequence, I have now written to my colleagues in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to propose a strategic wildfires forum, borrowing from the model in Scotland and in parts of England, to ensure that measures are taken to mitigate risk in the future.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. What resources will be made available to fully implement the recommendations in the report?

**Mr Attwood:** Resources are already directed towards ensuring the protection of natural habitats. For example, nearly £250,000 is given to the Mourne Heritage Trust in an effort for it to, among other things, protect the habitat of the Mournes, and it has been doing a very successful job. Similarly, I have made it clear to officials that funding for the equivalent group in the glens should be forthcoming to enable it to assist in the management of the habitats in the glens of Antrim and the Causeway Coast generally. Under legislation that was passed by the Assembly last year, other public bodies have an obligation to protect biodiversity in areas where they are responsible, and I hope that other organisations and other Ministers will protect all of that as we go forward. More than that, people have to be more responsible. There may be a need for by-laws on the use of campfires and barbecues. There may be a need for councils to provide greater wardening services, and there may be a need for proper and controlled burning in areas at risk. In all of those ways, beyond resources, the problem may be addressed.

**Mr B McCrea:** What actions does the Minister envisage in advising people in the peatland areas, where there is a particular issue with fires?

**Mr Attwood:** First, in some places at some times, there will be a need for controlled burning. If there is going to be controlled burning, it should not be in areas of blanket bog and it should not happen during the season of ground-nesting birds. It should happen in a way that mitigates carbon emissions and does not interfere with water quality and catchments in the area. If those standards are deployed, controlled burning might be appropriate, but it should not be appropriate in areas of blanket bog, given the value of the bog for diversity, given that it retains carbon and given the damage that burning would cause to the natural habitat.

**Ms Lo:** The Minister is probably aware that the Committee met the group, and we looked at the recommendations. We very much welcome the report. The first recommendation was for the protection of a strategic wildfire management plan. When will that be produced?

**Mr Attwood:** It will be produced if I can get buy-in from ministerial colleagues. It would be somewhat unilateral — although I am minded to act in that way at times — if I were to convene a forum without having those responsible for the farming industry and the fire and safety agencies in the room. So, subject to the views of the relevant Ministers, a wildfire prevention plan and a forum will be created to borrow from best advice in other jurisdictions and to apply our own minds to manage that going forward.

Ultimately, it seems to me that, if the Assembly can pass legislation for national parks and then deploy resources to follow national park designation, we will have a further mechanism to protect areas of diversity through the national plans framework to ensure that what happened in and around this time last year is not replicated in future years.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Members, I remind everyone not to have conversations during Question Time. If you want to have a conversation, please go outside the Chamber. I certainly wish to listen to the answer and hear the questions that are being asked.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a chuid freagraí go dtí seo. I am grateful for the information that the Minister gave on the investment in the conservation measures in the Mourne. Can anything further be done to protect areas such as the Mournes and the Ring of Gullion? Is there scope, in some cases, for cross-border co-operation on that issue?

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member and acknowledge the many good organisations, not just the heritage trust in parts of the North, including those in Slieve Gullion. I was recently in Camlough, and I passed by the lake. There are organisations there that are funded by government and by local councils and are doing mighty work in managing the area and in creating tourist opportunities and local employment. The more groups that are formed to manage our habitat, rivers and lakes, the better the management of the natural assets, which are such a wonder of this part of the world, will be. On the far side of our national parks legislation — if that is the mind of the Executive and the Assembly, and I trust that it will be — the opportunities for a cross-border national park arises capturing the Cooleys, the Mournes and Slieve Gullion. That would make a very big statement about the quality of natural assets on this island and about the opportunities for jobs in tourism going forward.



## Alcohol Misuse

4. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on his discussions with publicans and bus operators in relation to curbing irresponsible practices involving alcohol. (AQO 1623/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for his question. I acknowledge that the Minister for Social Development is bringing forward regulations on irresponsible drink promotions further to the legislation passed by this Assembly last year, and I acknowledge that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is also bringing forward minimum unit pricing proposals. Further to the initiative taken by Michael McGimpsey and me last year, a model has been adopted by the London Government in the past number of days to take other issues off the front page.

The Assembly, through the various Ministers or otherwise, needs to bear down on irresponsible actions, be it by those who sell drink in on-sales or off-sales or those who allow drink, especially excessive drinking, on buses or coaches. Those issues clearly now need to be addressed. In my meetings with the bus and coach operators and the nightclub owners, I said very firmly that the public, media and political spotlight is now very much concentrated on them and their activities. There are many good bus and coach operators, and there are many responsible sellers of drink, both in off-sales and on-sales. A small number are clearly on the wrong side of the law, and their irresponsible practices now need to be curbed. I will be bringing forward various proposals, both in respect of entertainments licences and bus and coach operator licences, in the near future.

**Mr Byrne:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he say whether any further consideration has been given to any other measures that might help to alleviate the problem? I agree with him that there are many responsible bus operators and, indeed, publicans and nightclub owners.

**Mr Attwood:** I acknowledge the last comment. There was one coach operator at the meeting recently who had a booking for a coach to take people to an underage disco. He said at the time of the booking that he would insist that there was no alcohol for sale. When he turned up to collect the underage people, another bus turned up and offered its services to those young people, with alcohol to be consumed on the bus. That is the sort of irresponsible behaviour we have on one hand and the sort of responsible behaviour on the other.

How do we take this forward? When it comes to the irresponsible nightclub owners, there should be a capacity, through the Department of the Environment (DOE), to build more rigorous terms and conditions into entertainments licences when those are issued. At the moment, DOE issues model terms that guide local councils on what should be built into the body of a licence. There should be a capacity, through my Department, to build into the model terms more demanding requirements on nightclub owners when it comes to the sale and consumption of alcohol in those premises. I intend to bring that forward in the near future.

Similarly, when it comes to coach and bus operators, is it credible that those who travel from point A to point B do so listening to disco music and having disco lights? Is that a safe mode of transport? Is that an interference to the bus driver? Does that not carry risk to those on the bus and

to those who are using the roads? Those are the sorts of issues that we are drilling down on in order to determine if there are requirements that we can build into the PSV regime —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Minister's time is almost up.

**Mr Attwood:** — that will see bus and operator licences more rigorously enforced.

**Mr Lynch:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given that the proposed new legislation might apply only to bus and rail stations, what measures in relation to alcohol and antisocial behaviour might be put in place to apply to park-and-ride bus shelters and stops?

**Mr Attwood:** The rules, if there are any changes to them, will not just apply to stations. They will apply to the buses and coaches themselves; those, at least, that are operated for commercial benefit. At the moment, when a PSV bus goes in for approval and checking annually, there are requirements laid down in respect of the PSV licence. It may be possible to build some restrictions into that licensing regime in respect of what can and cannot happen on a bus.

Similarly, when it comes to the consumption of alcohol on buses, which is not allowed, the law may need tightening up so that any bus driver or operator who allows the consumption of alcohol on buses that they have offered for commercial use may, like people who may consume alcohol on buses, be vulnerable to the law and be guilty of an offence. All of that will come down to enforcement. That is why the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) has been conducting — I have instructed it to continue to conduct — targeted enforcement operations against bus operators who, according to local intelligence and evidence, may be engaging in practices that see excessive amounts of alcohol being consumed on buses, with all the health and welfare risks that arise.

**Mrs Dobson:** Will the Minister detail what discussions he has had with publicans and the taxi industry to help to curb irresponsible drinking and subsequently to lead to safer travel home?

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for her question. As I indicated earlier, following the recent attention around these issues and tragic events that have occurred, I convened two meetings. One was with nightclub operators and was attended by about 45 people, and the other was with coach and bus operators and was attended by about 25 people. There was a very quiet mood at the meeting with the nightclub owners. I think that the operators in that room, who may have been subject to some public comment recently and may be prima facie in breach of the law, knew that, as I indicated earlier, the political, media and public spotlight was very definitely trained on them. The message that they received from me, from Pubs of Ulster, which has provided great assistance in this issue, and from the superintendent of the PSNI in Belfast who is responsible for that end of the business, was very clear: there will be greater enforcement, there may well be more laws, and entertainment licensing regimes may well be upgraded. Nightclub owners, especially one or two of the big ones in and outside Belfast, need to realise that they have to get their house in order. The law will be amended and there will be greater enforcement to ensure that their houses are in order.

2.45 pm

### Planning Applications: Local Council Opposition

5. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration Planning Service gives to a local council's opposition to a planning application. (AQO 1624/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** I thank Mr Robinson for his question. In two or three years, the situation will be very different to the one that prevails at the moment. In two or three years, on the far side of the review of public administration, local councils will have the responsibility to determine planning applications, save those of a strategic nature, which will be retained by DOE at a strategic planning level. In the future, as I have said very often, a big challenge for local councils will be that they will be the planning authority and will have to make decisions on the vast majority of planning applications. It will be a big challenge to local councils to ensure that they fulfil the standards of being a planning authority rather than continuing as they have before, legitimately, as a group of planning lobbyists in respect of planning applications that come before the council.

When it comes to the current role of a council in a planning application, under the law, the Planning Service has a duty to consult, and the views of the council will be a material consideration. Under current practice, a weekly list of applications is provided to the council. If councillors object to one that is proposed for streamlining, it will be withdrawn from the streamlining list. Councillors can have planning applications deferred for office meetings, and, in exceptional circumstances, for site meetings. On rare occasions, subject to certain rules, there can be a referral to the management board. Councillors and councils may feel that their views are not fully taken on board, but there are adequate opportunities under the law and in policy for those views to be taken on board by the Planning Service.

**Mr G Robinson:** In the meantime, can the Minister assure the Assembly that council opposition to a planning application is given full and proper recognition by planners? There is a belief among the public that that does not happen in some cases.

**Mr Attwood:** I thank Mr Robinson for that question. It may be that, behind the question, there is a particular matter that he is anxious about. He has repeatedly raised with me the issue of an application in the Limavady Borough Council area, and he has been very diligent in doing so. I intend to visit the site because it is a unique planning application in the Northern Ireland system. As a consequence, it might be legitimate for me to view the site in question. However, no works are ongoing and there is no licence live for that site.

Even though a council may unanimously be opposed to a certain application, it may be the case that the environmental health department of the very same council has not indicated any view of opposition. The council may be opposed, but the environmental health department may not have indicated its opposition. However, I reassure the Member that, certainly as long as I am Minister, a unanimous council opposition should have a significant bearing on the thinking of the planning office when it comes to a final determination.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I thank the Minister. Perhaps he could add a little more clarity on how his new planning legislation will

ensure that future council decisions are fair and equitable to all. How will they be reviewed by the Planning Service?

**Mr Attwood:** I thank Mr Nesbitt for his question and wish him the best of luck this weekend. It may not be welcome news to Mr Nesbitt, but I wish Mr McCallister all the best for this weekend as well. May the best man win.

The Member's question is an important one. Given the history of planning in some places in a previous phase of our history, there is a strong need to ensure that planning is transferred with all appropriate checks and balances. Whoever the Environment Minister is, and from whatever party, they must ensure certainty that checks and balances will prevail in a council planning application, not least because, given the charged history of planning and that it will be the single greatest function to be transferred to councils, we need to make sure that planning is done in a credible, fair and proper manner. That is why forthcoming legislation will lay down ethics requirements around the conduct of councils and councillors. Standards will be laid down for applications that should not be considered by a council but by its officers, given a potential conflict of interest. Requirements will be laid down, whereby a group of councillors —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Minister's time is almost up.

**Mr Attwood:** — will have the power to call in planning applications to ensure that things are fair and seen to be so.

**Mr McMullan:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Can the Minister assure me that councils' views on any marine planning application will be taken on board and will not be overridden by those of outside bodies?

**Mr Attwood:** I presume that the Member is going back to the issue of the Crown Estate. As I indicated in the Marine Bill's Second Stage debate, and particularly in reply to Mr Allister, the legal ownership of the seabed remains with the Crown Estate. However, under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, marine management out to 14 nautical miles was passed to the devolved Administration. Therefore, whether it is marine planning or in respect of any land-based application, responsibility falls strictly to local authorities. Yes, there will be consultation with all appropriate organisations. Yes, I have advised the Crown Estate, the devolved Governments and those in London and Dublin that I intend to develop a marine plan. I am obliged to do that, and it is good practice, given that we share the water known as the Irish Sea. However, decisions in respect of these matters will be taken by domestic authorities.

### Developers: Penalties

6. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will consider imposing penalties on developers who fail to complete building works after prolonged delays. (AQO 1625/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** I welcome the question and agree with the sentiment behind it. As I will try to demonstrate, I will work towards agreeing, as fully as I can, with its ambition.

Developers submitting planning applications and getting planning permissions at the same time as leaving to rack and ruin, decay and decline, sites that have not been developed or have been abandoned during development is

an issue that we need to address. That is why, on the far side of the ongoing work to mitigate the appearance of a number of sites in Portrush and Portstewart, I intend to call in a number of developers who continue to trade when, in my view, they have let sites, one of them a listed building, go into decay and decline at the same time as they make legitimate representations for planning approval in respect of other developments.

So, although at this stage I may not be going as far as imposing penalties for failure to complete building works on developers who continue to trade, I intend to put the spotlight on developers who continue to trade and who fail to complete works to ensure that they step up to the mark going forward.

**Mr Campbell:** I thank the Minister for his response and for his assurance that he is with me on the principle behind the objective of the question. Given his proactive approach to the matter thus far, would it be possible for him to ascertain over the next 12 or 18 months those areas across Northern Ireland where there are problems with developers who have sites but who neglect them, fail to look after them and do not do any of the repair or refurbishment work on them that their planning applications from councils require? Will he do that work and monitor the situation closely over 12 or 18 months and then bring action to bear against those developers?

**Mr Attwood:** I hope to bring action to bear against those developers and others before 12 or 18 months. On Thursday night, I had a long conversation with a representative of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA). Given that 5% of NAMA's assets are in the North of Ireland, I asked that organisation to scope out and identify where those assets are and to determine whether it could step in to deal with the decay and dereliction of sites that have been left, not developed or only partially developed. So, the issue is not just for developers but for NAMA, the banks and the administrators. Having spoken to NAMA, I intend speaking to those groups of people and to the developers in the near future.

In the prevailing economic circumstances, and in situations where sites are going into decline and developers are continuing to develop, I believe that the focus should be on those people. That applies whether the site in question is in Portrush or Portstewart, on the Lisburn Road in Belfast or in Derry ahead of 2013 and in general. I believe that attention should be brought to bear on all those matters.

The intervention in Portrush and Portstewart is a pilot scheme, but it is one that I hope the Executive will endorse more widely. Our built and natural environment are important, but our natural environment is damaged when the built environment in areas of beauty such as Derry and the north coast is prejudiced by the failure to protect, secure or otherwise develop sites. Consequently, by either going after the developers who are in the wrong or by the Executive intervening to provide money to help those areas of the built environment that are in decay, I hope that that can become a policy that can be rolled out over the next number of years.

**Ms Ruane:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Can the Minister tell me what moneys institutions are holding in bonds for unfinished developments? Are those bonds accruing interest?

**Mr Attwood:** I would be delighted to interrogate that question in my conversation with NAMA and others, so I will come back to the Member on that.

**Mr Dallat:** I know that many people in Portrush and Portstewart will welcome the Minister's response. He may recall a recent visit to a site at Strand Road in Portstewart that has lain undeveloped for over 30 years. Are we to assume today that the residents of that area may, at long last, have a solution to an eyesore that has scarred one of the most beautiful parts of Portstewart for 30 years?

**Mr Attwood:** I thank the Member for his question. I am aware of the site, and I have visited it in the past number of weeks. Given my many journeys to that part of the world and to Portstewart in particular, I have been aware of the site for a very long time. It is appalling that any developer could leave that site for a year, never mind a decade or, allegedly, two decades. The site overlooks the Portstewart beach and is next to the Portstewart golf course, where, no doubt, many people will come to play in the months before and after the Irish Open in Portrush. To leave that site in that way is an indictment of those who did so. If it is the case, which I have to determine, that a developer owns that site, or if there are any other sites in any other part of the North that a developer owns that are left to go into decay and dereliction while those developers are legitimately asking the Planning Service for help with planning applications, I think that those individuals and companies have questions to answer.

That is part of the reason why I have convened a meeting in Portstewart and Portrush to have developers and developers elsewhere answer the hard questions raised by Mr Dallat.

3.00 pm

## Health, Social Services and Public Safety

### Community Pharmacy

1. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the current position on the way forward for pharmacy services. (AQO 1635/11-15)

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** As I informed the Assembly in my statement on 13 March, I remain strongly committed to establishing a progressive and sustainable way forward for community pharmacy that will make better use of that group of skilled and dedicated professionals to help improve the health of the population and provide high quality advice and support to patients and the wider community.

I also announced to the Assembly on 16 March that an additional £8 million in funding for 2011-12 has been released and is available to support new services, improve premises and support the staffing of community pharmacies, particularly in rural and deprived areas. In reaching that funding position, I have had to proceed on the best evidence available. I now call on Community Pharmacy to agree to participate in the surveys that my Department will now undertake and provide the further information that is needed to move forward. The longer that information is withheld, the longer it will take to arrive at an agreed solution.

As outlined in the proposals contained in 'Transforming Your Care' the opportunity is there for community pharmacists, as they will be playing a much greater role in the future in providing front line care in the community. However, it follows that reimbursement and remuneration need to be modernised to promote and support that new vision and those new opportunities. It is a model based not on prescription volume and products supplied but on health outcomes for patients and working as members of an integrated primary care team.

I have agreed that the most recent court judgement should be subject to appeal because of its wider effect across government. However, I repeat my call to the representative body of community pharmacy contractors to engage with my Department and the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board to seek agreement and a way forward that will recognise and support the new and evolving role of community pharmacists in delivering improved services to patients and being fully involved in the new world of reformed health and social care services.

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle agus buíochas don Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he outline what steps he has taken to engage with community pharmacists? As I am sure he is well aware, they believe that the deal falls short of what they had originally anticipated.

**Mr Poots:** I agree that it falls short of what was anticipated, albeit, perhaps, what was anticipated was not correct in the first instance. I have instructed officials to continue to engage with Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland (CPNI) representatives on the way forward, particularly in respect of how we do things in 2012-13. The negotiations were very much about what has already happened in 2011-12. We had a very short time frame in which to do that. However, there is a huge opportunity to move forward together and make proper use of our community pharmacists in helping us to deliver 'Transforming Your Care' and giving them the requisite amount of money for the service that they provide.

**Ms P Bradley:** I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Has the extra injection of money which he announced a couple of weeks ago for community pharmacy been released into the system yet?

**Mr Poots:** Some £8 million of additional money, over and above what was on offer to pharmacists, was announced, and £7 million of that has been distributed at this point. The other £1 million could be distributed quickly.

**Mr Durkan:** I thank the Minister for his earlier answers. Will the Minister reveal to the Assembly the cost to his Department of the two recent judicial reviews relating to community pharmacy?

**Mr Poots:** Of course, the judicial review was not taken by me but by the CPNI, and we were responding to that. As I understand it, the costs were something in excess of £150,000.

However, that needs to be set against the estimated savings made as a result of the drugs tariff now being in place. The drugs tariff was not quashed or overturned by the court, and now stands. It is estimated that savings could be in the order of £12 million to £20 million. So, it is good news that the drugs tariff does stand, and it will be good news for

Northern Ireland plc because it means that there is more money to be spent in other areas of health as opposed to buying expensive branded drugs, and will allow us to use generic drugs better.

## Health and Social Care: Business Services Transformation Programme

2. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to make a statement on the outcome of the business services transformation programme, given that it is a matter of urgency for administration staff working in health and social care. (AQO 1636/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** The consultation period for the proposed business services transformation programme ended on 29 February 2012. I have since had meetings with political and staff representatives to discuss the proposals. I am now considering the responses received and points made as well as seeking further information. I will announce my decision in the near future.

**Mr Byrne:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister accept that there is great concern and anxiety in many locations across Northern Ireland regarding those proposals, and does he further accept that the impact is adversely affecting one section of the community in women?

**Mr Poots:** I accept that there is a considerable level of concern. I would have thought that there was not so much concern in Omagh, considering that was one of the sites chosen. Perhaps the Member is calling for us to change our minds and maybe put one of the facilities elsewhere. At this stage, however, we are giving consideration to everything. I have met staff representatives with local politicians and I appreciate that a lot of the people affected are women, particularly younger women, and it is not necessarily that suitable for a lot of them to travel. Nonetheless, all those things will be taken in the round as we arrive at a final decision on that issue.

**Mr I McCrea:** Will the Minister give an assessment of the scope for efficiencies in administration and management in the health service?

**Mr Poots:** I personally think that it is substantial. In this particular case, the savings that we will be aiming for as the years transpire will take us to around £17 million per year. We should not ignore that, because if we spend that sort of money on administration we do not have it to spend on hip replacements, accident and emergency or new cancer drugs. If Members are here today saying, "You should be spending that on administration as opposed to any of the other things", I am afraid that I will have to disagree with those Members. I will be standing by my election manifesto commitments in disagreeing with those Members who want to spend health money on administration. I want to spend it on healthcare.

**Ms S Ramsey:** I thank the Minister for his answers. Taking on board the points that the Minister raised in response to this question, will he outline if and when he became aware of the possibility that the proposal could have implications for the equality agenda?

**Mr Poots:** An equality impact assessment was carried out during the process. That is being revised as the consultation

results have come in. We take cognisance of all those issues. We are not looking for compulsory redundancies in the first instance. I encourage those who it does suit to go and take the offer of voluntary redundancy. However, we will look at all the issues. We will seek to ameliorate things as far as possible and treat our staff with appropriate care and dignity because we recognise that the staff are good staff, and that we are in a position of flux and change, which is never a nice position for people to be in. Nonetheless, I have to be driven by ensuring that we maximise what we get for our spend on healthcare. That is not in administration, which is a necessary element of healthcare nonetheless, but we need to ensure that it is as efficient as possible.

### Healthy Eating and Physical Activity

3. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department is promoting healthy eating and physical activity in areas of high social and economic deprivation. (AQO 1637/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** The recently published framework for preventing and addressing overweight and obesity in Northern Ireland, entitled 'A Fitter Future for All', clearly recognises the links between deprivation and inequalities and rates of obesity, participation in physical activity, and eating a healthy, nutritious diet.

While taking a population-wide approach, the framework seeks to focus particular action in areas of deprivation. In its role in driving forward the implementation of the framework, particularly in the context of addressing disadvantage and deprivation, the Public Health Agency explicitly focuses on communities in greatest need. It has invested significantly in supporting communities and building capacity at a local level to ensure their active participation and engagement in promoting positive health and well-being and tackling health inequalities.

**Mr Campbell:** The Minister will be aware that, particularly in the schools estate, many of the premises are based in working-class areas. Has he had any discussions, or are any planned, about the role that sporting facilities and the schools estate could play in combating obesity, particularly among young working-class people?

**Mr Poots:** I believe that every Minister is a Minister for health and everybody has a responsibility for the health of the population. In order to move things forward, I have had discussions with other Ministers, including the Minister of Education, who is in control of the schools estate, and the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, who is responsible for sport. The more that we can make better use of those facilities in our schools, particularly at night-time, so that people can benefit from having such facilities and being able to use them, the better.

The more that we can invest, the better, because you will have a number of people involved. For example, in east Londonderry, we have a skipping for health programme in two schools: Ballysally Primary School in Coleraine and Drumachose Primary School in Limavady. We also need to be looking at things like Cook it!, inspiring communities to get active together, cardiac rehab programmes in schools and health promotion in homes.

So, there is a lot more that can be done, and we should be encouraging schools and health organisations to work together to have a better-educated public, particularly when it comes to our young people.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given the recent debate about the visibility of cigarettes on shop counters, has the Minister considered any proposals to ensure that fruit and other healthy snacks are more prominent at locations where customers queue, particularly as, at those locations, they are surrounded by confectionery — sweets and crisps — and so on?

**Mr Poots:** First, that is not an area that I have responsibility for. Secondly, it is not an area in which we can dictate to businesses how they should conduct their affairs. I encourage people to eat more fruit and vegetables and be active. The Public Health Agency is doing courses of work, and there will be a greater focus on working-class communities to ensure that the health inequality that exists is improved and that its trajectory, which has been widening, is changed and we move to a situation where, because you are born in a certain part of Belfast or a certain deprived area in Northern Ireland, you are not more likely to die considerably earlier than someone who happens to live just a few miles further up the road.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an méid a dúirt sé ar an cheist seo go dtí seo agus ba mhaith liom an cheist seo a chur air. What mechanisms are there to maximise and co-ordinate interdepartmental co-operation on this issue?

**Mr Poots:** As I indicated, I have had a number of meetings with other Ministers, and I have further meetings set up with them. Last week, for example, I was with the Minister for Social Development, having had previous meetings with him on issues that cross the boundaries. I will be having meetings in the coming weeks with other Ministers to develop a government programme to respond on these issues. One area that is particularly important is education, because poor educational outcomes and poor health outcomes very often go hand in hand.

We are participating in discussions with, for example, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, the Department of Education and Sport NI to develop the level of physical activity in schools. A wide range of meetings are taking place, and they will continue.

3.15 pm

### Learning Disabilities

4. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to improve the lives of people with learning disabilities and their families. (AQO 1638/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** Improving services for people with a learning disability remains one of my highest priorities. Through continued implementation of the Bamford action plan, my Department, in collaboration with other Departments and agencies, is working to deliver improvements across a range of learning disability services. These include the ongoing resettlement of people from learning disability hospitals into

community settings, improved access to more flexible and appropriate respite provision and day opportunities, and support through the transition to adulthood.

**Mr Craig:** I thank the Minister for his answer and for how he prioritises those with learning disabilities. Will the Minister outline what is proposed under the Compton review, as there have been issues with people moving into the community and with day care cover?

**Mr Poots:** The health and social care review report presents a compelling case for change and explains why our current model of health and social care services is not sustainable into the future. In setting my vision for the future of health and social care services, my overriding concern is to drive up the quality of care and improve outcomes for patients and clients and ensure that they have the best possible experience in every aspect of their care. Key to that is promoting prevention and early intervention measures with the overarching objective of avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions.

I also fully recognise the need for greater productivity from the resources available to us, particularly in times of austerity. The learning-disabled community has a huge contribution to make to society in general. Last week, I attended a conference held by the Patient and Client Council, which helps to establish other facts as regards how we provide support and care.

The Minister for Social Development is being particularly co-operative in supporting communities and ensuring that we get significant assistance in meeting the Bamford commitments of having appropriate homes for people who have a learning disability as opposed to them being in hospital.

**Mr P Ramsey:** Minister, parents across Northern Ireland will be reassured to hear today that helping those with learning difficulties is one of the highest priorities for you and the Department. It is a hugely emotive, delicate and sensitive matter. Does the Minister envisage any difficulties this year with people with learning difficulties leaving school and looking for care in the community?

**Mr Poots:** Historically, there has been a problem. It is a major challenge to have adequate places for the number of people who leave school and receive support in, for example, adult resource centres and, indeed, those who want to continue to use adult resource centres. One of the issues is that, because we are much more successful in supporting people, people with learning disabilities are living to considerably older ages and, consequently, need the services for longer. That poses a challenge to us, and it is a question of how best we can address that challenge. However, we recognise the valid point that the Member makes.

**Mr Lyttle:** What level of short-term respite care provision is available to the families of those with learning disabilities in Northern Ireland, and does it meet current need?

**Mr Poots:** Respite care is certainly an important issue for us. The Health and Social Care (HSC) Board works quite closely with the trusts and seeks to make significant improvements to the availability and flexibility of respite care. That has to be particular to the needs of parents and carers. I regard respite care as a significant investment that pays us a significant dividend. If we do not support carers

and they fall ill themselves, that will create a much greater burden for us in respect of the care that has to be provided.

As a Government, we could never replicate the care that carers provide. I put on record once again my appreciation of the work that they do. We will seek to provide appropriate respite, where possible, while recognising that it will not always be possible to meet everybody's needs.

### Accident and Emergency Departments: Alcohol-related Incidents

5. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what policies or protocols are in place in accident and emergency departments to enable staff to deal effectively with alcohol-related incidents. (AQO 1639/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** My Department takes staff and patient safety very seriously. Each HSC trust operates a robust, zero-tolerance policy, overseen by a senior director. The policy requires the provision of a working environment where employees can undertake their duties without fear of abuse or violence from any person, including those who are under the influence of alcohol. Patients who attend A&E departments under the influence of alcohol, and who are violent or aggressive towards members of staff, are removed from the premises by security staff or the PSNI and may be subject to prosecution under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861.

In October 2010, schedule 21 to the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 was commenced. It was designed to deal with low-level antisocial behaviour in hospital premises. The schedule provides authorised officers in HSC trusts with the power to remove from hospital premises persons who cause nuisance or disturbance to HSC staff.

In addition, I am meeting the Minister of Justice on 16 April to discuss further how the problems caused by people who threaten staff and patient safety can be addressed and to consider possible areas of mutual collaboration between Departments.

**Mr A Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for that reply. First, I want to make it clear that I am in no way suggesting that people who have taken alcohol should not be given treatment in accident and emergency units. However, I want to make the point that there is a widely held public view that people who have taken alcohol and are abusive when in A&E units are given preferential treatment, which is of great annoyance to people who are waiting in a queue, sometimes for quite lengthy periods.

I make that point because I recently heard some health professionals basically admit that, at times, to solve the problem of a nuisance being created —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I think that the Member has made his point.

**Mr A Maskey:** — by people who have drink on board, they are brought in and treated ahead of other people who have been waiting patiently. No pun intended.

**Mr Poots:** I am glad that the Member has raised the issue. Very often, the media and the press will focus on failings in

the health service, but they do not focus very much on the abuse of the health service. The Member has highlighted where one area of abuse has taken place. I lay down a challenge to the media to go to an accident and emergency department on a Friday or Saturday night and see the abuse that our staff have to take from people who come in looking for help and who then abuse the people whom they are seeking the help from.

I get sick of people who constantly carp and criticise the health service when there are people out there who are abusing it, and they ignore that level of abuse. It is a shame on the media and the press for not taking that case up better.

**Mr Elliott:** I am sure that everyone in the House will agree with the Minister that it is not acceptable that members of the health service, and particularly those on the front line, be abused in any way. Has the Minister or Department put in place any additional security measures over the past few years to deal with issues of alcohol-fuelled disorder? If so, does he have any idea of how much those measures are costing the health service?

**Mr Poots:** Through the zero-tolerance strategy, we have more detailed recording of incidents, and those figures will reflect the difference between incidents that had malicious intent as a cause as opposed to the health condition of the patient. We need to recognise that most of the cases come from people with mental health issues, and such incidents do not take place in accident and emergency departments. There are other problems.

We also have a more significant role for the trusts' communication teams to play. They should be represented on any group in trusts. We are also engaging with staff who have been subject to physical or verbal abuse to learn from their experience and to understand the issues faced by front line staff.

We have done some work with England, and, in 2009-2010, the total number of incidents recorded there was 56,718, and the total cost of violence against staff was estimated at £69 million. In Northern Ireland, the number of incidents recorded was 8,186, which, if compared on a proportional basis to England, equates to around £10 million a year.

**Mr Dunne:** What discussions has the Minister had with ministerial colleagues in relation to cheap alcohol promotions?

**Mr Poots:** I am having ongoing discussions with Minister McCausland, in particular, on the issues around cheap alcohol. Interestingly, I found in a newspaper at the weekend an advertisement by Lidl for 2-litre bottles of strong cider discounted to £1. That is shameful. There was another advertisement from Asda promoting its cheap alcohol. Those supermarkets do not seem to get it. They are participating in the destruction of many people in our community and destroying the lives of people and their families, but they continue to do it. Then they complain when the Government suggests that we should have a minimum price for alcohol. I am glad David Cameron has come on board and is supporting it.

I also had, and am continuing to have, discussions with Minister Ford about having an on-the-spot fine for people who abuse our medical staff. If we can fine people £60 for parking six inches over a white line, I do not see why we cannot introduce fines for people who abuse our hospital staff.

## Health: Services for Children

6. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the need for services for children from nought to five years to be consolidated and better co-ordinated. (AQO 1640/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** The planning and commissioning of children's services, including those for children from nought to five years, has recently undergone considerable restructuring to ensure a more integrated approach, and I am content that that will provide consolidated and co-ordinated services to meet the needs of children.

The restructuring is borne out in the work of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP), which is chaired by the Health and Social Care Board and whose members come from a wide range of agencies, including the Public Health Agency, the Department of Education, the PSNI, the Department for Social Development and the voluntary and community sector.

The CYPSP has produced a draft strategic plan to improve the well-being and realisation of rights of children in Northern Ireland in relation to the six outcomes for children identified in the Government's 10-year strategy for children and young people. By collectively assessing a range of information on how children are doing against the six outcomes, the structure will enable the identification of priorities and influence where common investment is needed. That co-ordinated planning and commissioning process harnesses the added value from each member agency, ensuring services are targeted, and facilitates joint commissioning.

At departmental level, I am working closely with other Ministers and Departments, particularly the Department of Education, which has responsibility for early years. I am fully committed to continuing that collaborative approach.

**Mr Givan:** I thank the Minister for his response. Can he elaborate on the role he envisages the family nurse partnership playing in that regard?

The Minister has highlighted the role of the Department of Education. Does he agree that when the Department is looking at any issue around schools, he needs to ensure collaboration with the Department of Health? Will he elaborate on Knockmore Primary School, for example, and on whether any decision in respect of those special units should be taken in very close consultation with the relevant health trust?

**Mr Poots:** Supporting families and children through early intervention and prevention is, and will continue to be, a priority for my Department. That is reflected in such policies as Families Matter and the interventions supported under that, such as the family nurse partnership and family support hubs. It is our intention to roll the family nurse partnership out further. We can see the benefits of that, even at an early point.

The Member mentioned Knockmore Primary School. Speech therapists who work for the South Eastern Trust are very clear that they can provide the best possible service under the existing structure. If we move away from that structure, we may, therefore, be undermining that. However, I understand that there may be a strong case presented for some of the facilities to move to some of the further away

parts of Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, it is clear that our speech therapists are doing a very good job in that facility, and that needs to be maintained.

### **Royal Victoria Hospital: Waiting Lists and Trolley Waits**

7. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans to tackle waiting lists, including trolley waits, at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast. (AQO 1641/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** In the commissioning plan direction that was issued to health and social care on 29 February, I have set challenging targets for the delivery of health and social care services, including the requirement for higher levels of performance within emergency care departments.

I expect the HSCB to work with the PHA and the trusts to ensure that those targets are met. In addition, the current situation in some of our emergency departments is unacceptable. I expect to see a significant improvement in performance. I have asked the Health and Social Care Board to provide a robust plan of immediate actions to secure improvement.

### **3.30 pm**

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That ends Question Time to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. I ask Members to take their ease for a moment or two.

## **Executive Committee Business**

### **Superannuation Bill: Second Stage**

*Debate resumed on motion:*

*That the Second Stage of the Superannuation Bill [NIA 6/11-15] be agreed.*

*Question put.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 74; Noes 12.*

### **AYES**

*Mr Allister, Ms M Anderson, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.*

### **NOES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McDevitt and Mrs McKeivitt.*

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the Second Stage of the Superannuation Bill [NIA 6/11-15] be agreed.*



3.45 pm

### **Rates (Deferment) (Revocation and Savings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**

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

*That the draft Rates (Deferment) (Revocation and Savings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.*

Either the Health Minister thinks that he has got a new job here or he is trying to take mine.

I will briefly set out the background to the rates deferment scheme before I address the reasons why the regulations are before us today. As Members may recall, the rates deferment scheme for owner-occupier pensioners was introduced in April 2010, having come out of the 2007 Executive review of the domestic rating system. The scheme provides a payment choice for pensioners, allowing them to defer the payment of rates until their death or the sale of their property. It was intended to provide a further option for those who are asset-rich but income-poor, those with a modest or fixed income and those who are not eligible for means-tested rates support.

The scheme allows pensioners and their partners to roll up their rates bills at a concessionary rate of interest and is subject to a number of conditions. The property must be the sole or main residence of the owner-occupier pensioner with at least 40% equity in the property and have a capital value in excess of £50,000. The scheme is not one to enter into lightly. It is certainly not a quick-fix payment solution; rather, it involves a long-term commitment that could last for more than 30 years.

I stress to Members that deferment provides a payment choice. It is not a relief, nor does it provide free money. A cost is also attached to it, both for my Department and for participants. In the last Assembly, the Finance and Personnel Committee considered that, even if only a small number of pensioners were to benefit, the choice of deferment should be made available to them. Similar views that it would be a useful option to offer pensioners were expressed during the consultation and in that Assembly. Others viewed the scheme as a death duty or expressed concern about the scheme's cost and revenue implications. In light of that and prior to its introduction in 2010, I stated that I wanted a scheme that not only was effective but attracted sufficient and manageable numbers. As a result, I gave a commitment that, in a couple of years' time, I would conduct a thorough evaluation of the scheme to examine how many people it helps and how effectively it provides value for money. Given the novel nature of the scheme, that was intended to allay the concerns of some Members. It also reflected the fact that, at that time, it was impossible to predict the level of interest in and the uptake of the scheme. My Department has now undertaken an evaluation of the scheme having sought the views of key stakeholders and the Finance and Personnel Committee.

While set-up and running costs have been lower than was originally anticipated, take-up has also been much lower. In fact, the figures have been disappointingly low despite the strenuous efforts of Land and Property Services (LPS) to

promote the scheme, which included a section in the leaflet that was posted out with rate bills in 2010-11. In addition, a deferment factsheet and detailed guidance booklet was made available. LPS also refers to the deferment scheme at outreach events that it attends, which has generated interest. Despite that, over the past two years, only a handful of ratepayers — 21 in total — have deferred their rates. Even the number of people who have shown interest in the scheme and requested an application form or an illustration of what the deferment debt could be for them is in the low hundreds. It is not possible to know exactly why applicants decided not to proceed. However, I consider that a key factor will have been a lack of appreciation of the financial implications with regard to the amount of debt that could accrue over the deferment period, which could be up to 30 years. There is also the impact on a person's equity in their property. For example, deferring rates on a property with a capital value of £400,000 could result in deferred debt of £140,000 over 20 years. That is a significant sum by any standards, even with a modest interest rate of 1%. It should also be remembered that, even without interest, the rates on such properties would be in excess of £70,000 over the same period, which is not an inconsequential sum.

Although the lack of applications has been a concern, looking forward, I believe the relative cost of the scheme to be a more serious issue. The annual running costs of the scheme per participant are extremely high relative to the sums of rates that are deferred, and that is largely down to the extremely small numbers involved. In addition, given the financial and legal implications of the scheme, the initial set-up costs were high. For example, my Department had no choice but to obtain advice from the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) on debt projections and establishing an actuarial debt model. As one member of the Finance and Personnel Committee, who at the time was supportive of the scheme, put it:

*"It will be a relatively costly scheme for the Department to administer. If take-up turns out to be extremely low and the costs are significant, it may be necessary to determine whether it should be continued." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 49, p118, col 1].*

Unfortunately, I think that we have already reached that point.

In saying that, I readily admit that I was never an enthusiastic supporter of the measure. Although it was introduced as a result of the consultation process undertaken before my time as Finance Minister, I agreed, as a member of the Executive, to allow it to go ahead for a trial period, hence my commitment to undertake an early evaluation. As part of that process, my Department looked at a number of options, including continuing with the current scheme or amending it. The hope was always that higher numbers would avail themselves of deferment so that the administrative costs per individual would be as low as possible. The administrative costs of the scheme per participant have been around £1,400 per year over the two-year period, and the sums of rates deferred have been in the region of £1,500 per participant per year. Therefore, the cost of running the scheme was nearly the same as the sums of rates that were deferred yearly.

Therefore, the scheme has unfortunately turned out to be ineffective. It does not provide value for money for the Assembly, and, as a result, I do not believe that we can,

hand on heart, support its continuation. It falls into the "nice to have" category, but, given the extreme pressure on public expenditure, that is not good enough. For that reason, I intend to close the scheme with effect from 1 April.

Although no applications —

**Mr Allister:** Should I assume from the sad saga that the Minister has outlined that this was some hare-brained scheme from a direct rule Minister, or did someone else think this up and implement it?

**Mr Wilson:** Had he been listening, the Member would have realised that it came out of the 2007 review of rates that the Executive undertook. I do not agree that it was a hare-brained scheme by any means. It was a means of trying to help to address the issue of those who lived in expensive properties but did not have a great deal of income. The hope was that there would be a much greater uptake, but, as I have outlined to the House, only 21 people decided to participate. I am not sure whether that was because of people not wanting to eat into the equity in properties that they perhaps hoped to leave to their family or simply because of the scheme's requirements, including the need to have 40% equity, the property needing to be of sufficient value and the costs that could accumulate over 20 years. As it turned out, what was a well-meaning and genuine attempt to address a problem did not work out.

We should not forget that, at the time that the measure was introduced, a huge debate was going on about those who lived in large houses, whose family had left, who did not have a great deal of income and who could not afford to pay the massive rates on their property. I think that the Assembly sought to be innovative in trying to address the issues that arose as a result of that difficulty.

As it turns out, it would not be the first innovative measure that the Assembly has tried. In fact, a few months ago, just after the Budget, I agreed that some of the rates measures that we had provided for the so-called green homes had had such a low uptake that we should stop doing that as well and use the money for the warm homes scheme and other schemes that would help to reduce heating bills. I do not agree with the Member that it was a hare-brained scheme. It was a well-meaning attempt to address a problem that did not work out as had been anticipated. For that reason, I intend to close the scheme. Although no applications will be accepted —

**Mr D Bradley:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Wilson:** Yes, I will give way, and I hope, at least, that the Member, on this occasion, will make an original point and will not just copy the Member for North Antrim. He is getting into a terrible habit of doing that, and there is no point in repeating and recycling points that someone else has already made. In fact, the Member for North Antrim may start charging him if he continues to steal points from him.

**Mr D Bradley:** I thank the Minister for giving way. I do not think that one occasion can indicate a habit, but I will take his advice and I will be wary in the future.

Will the Minister explain the situation of the 21 current participants? Perhaps he mentioned it and I may not have heard it. Will their participation in the scheme be protected?

**Mr Wilson:** The Member was reading my mind. I was just coming to that point. I will answer it because it is very important. People entered into what is a long-term commitment and did so in good faith. They paid substantial upfront legal costs as well, and the Member is right: it would be remiss to simply abandon those people. Although no applications will be accepted after the end of March, I assure Members that those who are currently deferring rates will be unaffected by the change. They will continue to be able to defer rates until such times as they die or, alternatively, sell or transfer their property.

I also consider that it may be more effective to redirect the administrative savings from the closure of the scheme into Land and Property Services' wider relief take-up strategy of targeting relief towards those most in need, which has the aim of increasing the take-up of reliefs such as housing benefit, rate relief and lone pensioner allowance, which reach a large number of pensioners. For these reasons, I ask Members to support the revocation of the rates deferment scheme, with savings provisions for current participants, and I commend the draft regulations to the House.

**Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his opening remarks, through which and, indeed, his responses to interventions he has answered quite a number of points.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel received a briefing from officials on 15 February 2012 on the evaluation of the rates deferment scheme for pensioners. The scheme, as has been outlined, allowed qualifying pensioners to defer payments of rates at a preferential rate of interest until the time of their death or the sale of their property. Members heard that the take-up level of the scheme was much lower than anticipated, with only 21 agreements entered into in the two years in which the scheme was in operation. In addition, the administrative costs of the scheme were considerable, relative to the sums of rates deferred. The Minister said that the average amount of rates deferred was £1,500 per person per year, while the average administration cost was £1,400 per person per year. The scheme, therefore, did not appear to be effective or to provide value for money. The Committee was advised that, as a consequence, the Minister proposed the scheme's closure with effect from the end of the current rating year.

The Committee noted that savings provision will be made for cases where an application is made to the Department before 1 April and a deferment agreement in respect of that application entered into before 1 October 2012. Provision is also made to protect partners and surviving partners of people who have entered into a deferment agreement; that is the point to which the Minister just referred.

Following the evidence session, the Committee agreed that it was content with the Minister's proposal to close the rates deferment scheme for pensioners from 1 April 2012. The policy proposals contained in the statutory rule were subsequently considered by the Committee on 22 February.

On 14 March, the Committee formally considered the statutory rule that is before the Assembly today, together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules, which raised no issues by way of

technical scrutiny. The Committee agreed to recommend that the Rates (Deferment) (Revocation and Savings) Regulations (NI) 2012 be affirmed by the Assembly, and I support the motion.

**4.00 pm**

**Mr Cree:** As a member of the Committee, I was fully involved in the discussions and the negotiations, and I am quite happy to support the motion.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an méid a dúirt sé cheana féin. I thank the Minister for the explanations that he has given. The time has come to end the scheme. Given that the running costs outweigh the benefits to older ratepayers and that there are only 21 participants, it does not make sense to continue with it. I agree that the sensible thing is to bring the scheme to an end, and I am happy that the Minister has clarified the fact that the existing 21 participants can remain in the scheme. I am happy to support the motion.

*(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy]  
in the Chair)*

**Mr Wilson:** I thank all of the Members who contributed to the debate. The interventions raised Members' points on the wisdom of the scheme originally, and I have answered those as well as Mr Bradley's point about protection for those who are already in the scheme. I hope that I have given assurance to Members on both of those issues. I thank the Committee for its work in looking at the regulations, and I trust that Members will show the necessary support for the order. Although, generally, I do not favour restricting the options available to ratepayers, in this case, it is hard to justify the continuation of the scheme for new applicants. Therefore, I commend the order to the Assembly.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the draft Rates (Deferment) (Revocation and Savings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.*

## **Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**

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

*That the Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.*

These regulations are made under the Mesothelioma, etc., Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and increase the compensation payable under the Act to persons diagnosed with diffuse mesothelioma or, if the person has died, their dependants. The increases under the order maintain parity with the corresponding scheme operating in Great Britain. I will outline briefly the purpose of the scheme. Mesothelioma is an asbestos-related cancer of the lung or abdominal linings. It is a unique disease. It has a long latency of 20-plus years. It is rapidly progressive and invariably fatal, with death occurring within 18 months of the onset of illness.

The scheme provides financial support to vulnerable people and their families within a matter of weeks, without the need to establish an occupational link or, indeed, any causal link. The introduction of the scheme means that many people who were previously not eligible for help, for example, those who were unable to pursue a civil claim or to claim a lump sum under the pneumoconiosis scheme now have access to financial help for this terrible disease. Sufferers of mesothelioma are eligible for a payment, regardless of whether they were employees, self-employed or, indeed, never worked, provided they have not already received a compensation payment from another source.

These regulations increase the amounts payable under the mesothelioma scheme by 5.2%, in line with this year's uprating of industrial injuries benefits from April 2012. The amount payable to a person aged 37 or under at diagnosis will be increased from £77,506 to £81,536, the same maximum that can be paid from April 2012 under the pneumoconiosis scheme.

The increase in the amounts payable ensures that the compensation provided under the scheme maintains its value and continues to support those in need. I am sure that Members across the Assembly will be happy to support the regulations.

**Mr A Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development):** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for tabling the debate on the regulations this afternoon. On behalf of the Social Development Committee, I want to make it clear that the Committee considered the matter on 23 February 2012 and again at its meeting on 8 March and was content to give its approval to this regulation on mesothelioma, which, as the Minister has said, is to ensure that victims of that disease get a lump sum — or, if they are deceased, their relatives do.

This disease is a cancer of the thin membrane that lines the chest and the abdomen, and, as the Minister has said, it can be latent for up to 30 years, in which case the companies that may have been responsible for an unsafe environment are often out of business. So, this regulation will ensure that such a payment can be made.

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It should also be noted that, from April, the increase in most benefits will be based on the consumer prices index, and a number of members of the Committee were concerned at potential reductions in that. However, as the Minister said, this year, under the consumer price index (CPI), the increase will be 5.2%. Members of the House may wish to give some attention to that in the time ahead. The Committee is content that the statutory rule be confirmed by the Assembly.

**Mr G Robinson:** Like other Members, I am dealing with a constituent who suffers from severe chest problems that are directly related to mesothelioma problems picked up in his former employment, and I want to stress to Members how difficult life can become due to that awful condition. Anything that can be done to ease the impact on the everyday quality of life is welcome, and I concur with the Minister that we must make sure that people who suffer from it are properly compensated.

I also want to use this opportunity to urge those who engage in DIY to ensure that they at least use a mask that will cover their mouth and face when drilling in case there are unidentified asbestos sources in their work or at home. I urge Members to support the motion to ease the lives of people and their families in a practical and welcome way. Therefore, I support the motion.

**Mr Copeland:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important issue. It is a condition that continues to kill up to 50 people a year in this Province. When I was not that old, my father was involved in shipbuilding in Belfast and worked on occasions in the cavities of some of those vessels. He described asbestos raining down like snow in the days before people understood what the fallout from asbestos would be.

We are in economically strained times, and it is only fair to those who have found themselves afflicted by this terrible illness that this Government should increase the amount that is payable to them or their dependants in line with the consumer price index to shield them, as much as we can, from the current austerity measures that are affecting other parts of the Budget and to help and, hopefully, ensure that their quality of life is not further diminished.

Mesothelioma should be treated differently to other asbestos-related diseases because diffuse mesothelioma is a particularly nasty variant of that cancer. There is a particularly poor life expectancy compared with other diseases like this. Other diseases that are in payment under the 1979 Order do not necessarily always end in a fatality, but diffuse mesothelioma is almost always fatal. The median survival from diagnosis varies according to who you are talking to and from study to study, but it is mostly within the range of six to nine months, with most people passing through a not particularly pleasant death within 18 months of diagnosis. Every person diagnosed with the condition will need additional support and help, and many of them find it hard, as the Chair said, to find, after so many years, that this has been lurking in their metabolism.

They will feel angry and bitter, and many of their relatives and friends will share those thoughts, so it is important that anyone diagnosed with mesothelioma has access to information about their illness and treatment and to emotional support and someone who can talk to them when they feel that they need it.

Once sufferers and relatives have absorbed the initial impact of the diagnosis, they are faced with the considerations of finance. Financial security becomes a key concern, not only for the person who suffers from the condition but for those who will be left when things have run their course. There is nothing that I can do other than support those measures in the Chamber and endorse the views and thoughts of everyone else.

**Mr Durkan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for bringing the regulation to the House today, and we will certainly support it. It will go some way to help ease the suffering of victims of mesothelioma, which, although it is a very rare cancer, is unfortunately becoming more common here. In circumstances where it is too late, it will provide some degree of security for victims' families. The Chair of the Committee, Alex Maskey, mentioned the retail price index (RPI) and the consumer price index. We would prefer it to be in line with the retail price index, but we are certainly supportive of the regulation.

**Mr McCausland:** I am pleased with the consensus of support across the Assembly for the regulations. I thank the Chair and members of the Social Development Committee for the very positive way in which they have dealt with the regulations.

No amount of money will ever compensate individuals and families for the suffering and loss caused by diffuse mesothelioma, but those who are suffering rightly deserve some form of monetary compensation. It is essential that sufferers receive some level of compensation before it is too late. I am certain that we all want to ensure that the increased lump sum compensation payment under the Act continues to be available to those who contract that terrible disease or their dependants. I therefore commend the motion to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.*

## **Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**

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

*That the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.*

The regulations are made under the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1979. They increase the compensation payable under the Order to those suffering from certain dust-related diseases and their dependants who satisfy the conditions of entitlement on or after 1 April 2012. The increase in amounts payable under the Order maintain parity with the corresponding scheme operating in Great Britain and are in line with the annual uprating of social security benefits.

I will briefly outline the purpose of the Order. People suffering from an industrial disease can sue their employer if that disease was contracted as a result of working for that employer. Some diseases covered by the Order can take years to develop symptoms and may not be diagnosed until decades after exposure to the dust. Given the time frames involved, it is possible that employers responsible may no longer exist. Consequently, sufferers and their dependants can experience great difficulty in obtaining compensation.

The scheme was introduced in 1979 to provide a lump sum payment for sufferers who are unable to pursue employers through the courts as the employers are no longer in business. In order to receive a payment under the scheme, a person must have been awarded industrial injuries disablement benefit. A claim can also be made by the dependants after the death of the sufferer. To receive the payment, there must be no relevant employer who can be sued and court action must not have been brought or compensation received in respect of any of the diseases for which a person is claiming. The lump sum payment is in addition to the weekly industrial injuries disablement benefit that is paid in relation to the same disease.

### **4.15 pm**

The scheme covers five respiratory diseases, most of which are directly related to asbestos exposure. They are: mesothelioma; diffuse plural thickening; primary carcinoma of the lung; byssinosis; and pneumoconiosis, which includes asbestosis. The lump sum payment is based on the age of the sufferer and the level of disability, with higher amounts paid to people with higher levels of disability and whose disability arises at an early age. Lower amounts are payable to dependants who claim after the sufferer has died. The maximum amount that can be paid from 1 April 2012 is just over £81,536 for a person aged 37 or under at diagnosis.

The amounts that are payable under the scheme are increased by 5.2% in line with this year's uprating of industrial injuries benefits. The increase will help to ensure that the compensation that is provided under the Order maintains its value. I am sure that Members across the Assembly will agree on the importance of supporting those who suffer from those terrible diseases and will, therefore, support the regulations.

**Mr A Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development):** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for bringing forward the proposal. The Committee considered the matter on 1 March and 8 March 2012. It was content that the statutory rule be made.

Members have already heard from the Minister and, I think, Mr Robinson, that the lung disease can be very incapacitating. When such a disease is brought about simply through the course of doing one's work over many years in conditions that a person believed were safe, it must be even more difficult to deal with. The Committee understands that the effects can be chronic and long term and can seriously impact on one's quality of life and the lives of the victim's family. Although it has already been said that no amount of money is a substitute for good health, it is important that the regulations ensure that the amounts payable offer some assistance to sufferers and their dependants. It is important that there are increases. The regulations will increase the amounts payable to sufferers of the dust-related diseases that are noted in the regulations or to the dependants of persons who were disabled by such a disease before they died. Therefore, the Social Development Committee recommends that the Assembly affirm the statutory rule.

**Mr Durkan:** I support the motion, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. It is another piece of legislation that will help to ease the suffering of victims and dependants who suffer bereavement.

**Mr McCausland:** I am pleased with the consensus of support across the Assembly for the regulations. I thank the Chair and members of the Social Development Committee for the very positive way in which they have dealt with the regulations.

It is perhaps worth mentioning briefly that the annual incidence of asbestos-related disease continues to increase. That is because of the typically long period between asbestos exposure and the onset of the disease, which can be up to 60 years. That means that many deaths are a reflection of past rather than current working conditions. The current annual number of deaths from asbestos-related diseases in the United Kingdom is around 4,000. Of those, around 100 are in Northern Ireland. I welcome the support and endorsement of the Committee for the regulation. I am certain that we all want to ensure that the value of compensation under the 1979 Order is not eroded by inflation. The regulations will make sure that that does not happen. I commend the motion to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.*

## Private Members' Business

### Royal Victoria Hospital: Accident and Emergency

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

**Mr McCallister:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly recognises the unprecedented pressures currently being placed on the accident and emergency department at the Royal Victoria Hospital; notes with concern that staff are working in extremely challenging circumstances and the impact that this has on staff and patients; accepts the recommendation contained in the recent review of the provision of health and social care that the Department should encourage only people in need of emergency treatment to attend accident and emergency departments; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to review urgently the services at the Royal Victoria Hospital, to ensure that the necessary permanent staff are employed on an effective and efficient basis to allow the smooth operation of the accident and emergency department.*

Members will no doubt be aware of fairly endless news reports and media coverage of some shocking events, predominantly at the Royal Victoria Hospital's A&E department, and of the pressure on A&E provision across Northern Ireland. I am sure that everyone agrees that this is something that has to be addressed, dealt with and treated with the utmost seriousness. I am aware that some members of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety gathered to meet members of the Belfast Trust to get an update on the A&E situation. Unfortunately, my Chief Whip duties meant that I could not be there, but I am sure that the Chair of the Committee will fill the House in on any progress that was made at that meeting.

The impact of this situation creates several difficulties. Staff morale is an issue that, of course, must be dealt with. We have a huge problem with staff morale because they feel under endless pressure, which is not good for staff, their health or the service that they provide. It is also very damaging to the morale of the public, for whom the service is provided and who rely on it. The House has to recognise that the past few weeks and months have been hugely damaging to public morale.

Services at the Royal have come under significantly more pressure since the announcement last summer that the City Hospital's A&E department was to close. At the time, I warned that processes, beds and people had to be put in place to cope with that closure. I regret that that does not appear to have been the case to deal with the numbers that we are experiencing.

I am sure that we all accept that admissions to A&E change from day to day and season to season. However, some of the excuses given by the Trust and the Minister have been around things such as winter pressures. Look at the weather

that we have had over this winter. It has been one of the mildest on record. The weather has not been a factor. Yes, it could reasonably be argued that the weather might have been a factor in the two previous winters, but this winter has been very mild. If we are struggling and the system is at breaking point after one of the mildest winters on record, what would it have been like had we had the severe winter weather that we had in the previous two? The Minister will probably give us figures on flu levels. We have not even had the same crises that we had to deal with over the past several years with swine flu and the pressures that it put on the system. The system, quite clearly, is not fit for purpose.

The motion refers to the acceptance in 'Transforming Your Care' of some of the directions of travel needed to reduce pressures on our A&E services and how we get people to enter the health service at, perhaps in some cases, a more appropriate point from which to get their pathway through NHS treatment.

We can all support those wishes, but I have warned the Minister consistently that he cannot close units without having the systems in place to handle the backlog. If he wants people to go to doctors' surgeries instead of A&E units, they have to have access to them and be able to get there. If he wants people to go to other minor injuries units or to be triaged somewhere else, he has to have those facilities in place before he closes centres. That is the problem that we are facing in our A&E system.

Some appalling tragedies have happened, with some people dying. No one would want any of our loved ones to suffer the indignity of passing away on a hospital trolley. That news was appalling and shocking to us all, never mind our hearing about people having to wait for hours, sometimes five or 12, for treatment in an accident and emergency unit, where time is of the essence. So, if we accept that we need to move to a better point of entry, it is the Minister's role and responsibility to get that right before he makes changes.

I have warned the Minister about this previously, but the other difficulty that he will face will be when he goes to take £83 million over the Compton review period out of acute services to put into community-based services. Although many in the House agree with that direction of travel, he will have difficulty delivering that and avoiding a crisis in every A&E unit across Northern Ireland, not just that in the Royal Victoria Hospital. That is one of the challenges that the Minister faces.

It will also be a huge challenge when he starts to close other A&E units. He has already witnessed the pressures that his decision on the City Hospital A&E unit created for the Royal Victoria Hospital, and, when he starts to look at other A&E units across Northern Ireland, whether they are the units in the Causeway or Daisy Hill hospitals or in the Mater Hospital in north Belfast, or whether there is a completion of what he announced for Lagan Valley Hospital, he will see that he has serious problems to deal with. I do not want to see that situation continue. The pressures on him to deliver will be enormous, and, when he takes his £83 million out of the acute side and puts it into community care, he will have tremendous difficulty matching those up without causing the very crisis that we see in the Royal Victoria Hospital now. If the Minister does not act and do something now to get this situation under control, we will see it repeated across Northern Ireland.

The numbers of people who are waiting in Belfast have been pretty dramatic. Last month, nearly 400 people waited over 12 hours to be dealt with. I pay tribute to Altnagelvin Hospital, which, with a rate of just 0.1%, had the lowest rate of the overall December 2011 average. That average was 1.9%. The figures for Belfast Trust are significantly higher than that. This issue needs to be addressed. The Minister has put the challenge to health trust officials, saying that, if they do not sort this out, they will be sacked. The buck stops with him. He is the Health Minister. He has to take responsibility.

The Minister has to get this issue sorted out in Belfast before it spreads across Northern Ireland and before we start seeing increased waiting times in other places. He should do that before he decides to close other A&E units, before he considers closing the A&E units of the Causeway or Daisy Hill hospitals or before he changes the system across Northern Ireland. If he does not do that, he will find that people are waiting longer and longer. Although the waiting times might be tremendously inconvenient to people, sadly, however, the most serious part of this situation is when the outcomes become considerably worse and when the types of tragedies occur such as that in the Royal Victoria Hospital that we heard about in recent weeks. I do not want to see that type of situation repeated anywhere in Northern Ireland, and I am quite sure that no colleague in the House wants to see it either. So, I very much hope that the House accepts our motion and that there is widespread support for it.

I am sure that everyone here will have been written to or spoken to about some fairly horrendous wait in A&E and the level of service given. I want to see the situation improve across Northern Ireland. I want to see whether the Minister can deliver on his promise to cut the number going to A&E and deliver a better system for minor injury services at A&E. He has to get that right before he moves to close any more A&Es. When there is such pressure in the Royal Victoria Hospital, he may well want to look at whether it is practical to open up the A&E unit at the City Hospital again to relieve and deal with those pressures. However, the Minister must get a grip on the issue.

4.30 pm

**Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate as Chair of the Committee. I take the opportunity to commend those who tabled the motion for securing the debate. It is a very topical debate, and fair play to them for moving and shaking in the Business Committee to secure it. It is important that we debate relevant issues more quickly than we do currently. I also take the opportunity to welcome the Minister to the debate. He has taken a hands-on approach to a lot of the issues, and it is important that we get as good an update as possible on a daily basis on the issues facing A&E.

A number of weeks ago, I went to the A&E unit in the Royal. I am in the position of being the constituency MLA as well. People had been stopping me in the street, and it was the first time in a long while that people were vexed about an issue. No one knew I was coming. I tried to go in with a low profile, but, being the type of person I am, I could not. When I arrived, everyone knew I was there. However, I saw

at first hand the pressure that not only staff but patients and their families are under. They were trying to deal with a serious issue in serious circumstances. When I got talking to people, I found that there was a perception that this was all down to the closure of the A&E unit at the City Hospital. That is an issue that I have raised with the Minister, the Committee and the hospital staff. That is the perception. Some say that the situation is due to winter pressures, but we have not really had a winter like we had last year. I am not getting into the technicalities of that; those are issues that health professionals can answer. I had a conversation this morning with Alex Maskey. He said to me that this was an issue in his constituency offices in South Belfast. The perception there is that this situation is due to the closure of the City A&E. So I am glad that the Minister is here to try to deal with some of those issues. We need to talk about how to instil confidence in the community.

The proposer of the motion mentioned that the Committee paid a visit to the Royal hospitals this morning. I have only five minutes in which to speak, which is a pity, because I would like to go into more specific detail. We had justified concerns, and we took the opportunity to go this morning. It was an announced visit. Some people are cynical and say that things are hidden when you go on an announced visit, but I do not think so. We saw things at first hand and were able to talk to the senior medical staff there. I take the opportunity to thank them for facilitating our visit.

Like the other Committee members, I was hugely impressed by the dedication and professionalism of the medical staff, from nurses and doctors to the support staff. They are committed to dealing with the problem, and, indeed, the senior management of the Belfast Trust is also committed to dealing with it. However, the reality is that A&E staff cannot cope with this on their own. In any media interview that I have done, I have commended the staff at A&E, because I know that they are doing a great job. I have said that that the problem is not in A&E; the problem is in other parts of the hospital. A&E needs to be supported by other parts of the hospital. It is important to acknowledge the Minister's recent statement in which he also highlighted that issue. I know that medical staff work above and beyond the call of duty in A&E, but there are blockages in other parts of the hospital. So whatever changes are made in any A&E system, we need to ensure that the system itself changes to suit that need.

One of the issues, based on the Minister's recent statement, is that the Committee met the Royal College of Nursing. It has also raised concerns. People are trying to do this in a mature way. We are not trying to create panic out there. When people go to our A&Es, they get the best service, but the reality is that there is a perception that our A&Es are not working. There is a perception that they are failing. The Minister is here. A key issue raised with us today about nurses being able to discharge is that a lot are band 5 nurses. So, are we going to put that pressure on band 5 nurses, or is there a system to make the nurses band 6 or band 7?

**Mr B McCrea:** Will the Member explain just what a band 5 nurse is, please?

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

**Ms S Ramsey:** Thank you. I may need the extra minute for that. A band 5 nurse, as it was explained to us, is probably somebody who has just graduated. However, some of the nursing staff who have been staff nurses for a long time are still band 5. So, there is an issue through the Agenda for Change. Do we need to move those nursing staff into a higher band, or are we going to put pressure on nursing staff who are band 5 to discharge patients when, according to their band level, they are not capable of discharging patients? Those questions need to be answered.

**Ms P Bradley:** Would the Member agree that they could be looking at band 7 nurses, who are nurse practitioners and already doing nurse-led discharges?

**Ms S Ramsey:** Absolutely, and that is the multitude of issues that needs to come into play here. In the 12 seconds that I have left, I will say that it is again a question of mentioning the Minister's personal involvement. It is crucial that we look at A&E departments across the North and the impact that the pressures that one A&E is under may have on others.

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

**Ms S Ramsey:** We also, Minister, through you and as elected reps need to restore confidence in our community. Our A&E departments are safe. People need to be aware that, when they go to A&E, they will get a safe service.

**Ms P Bradley:** Excuse me, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I have just dropped all my notes on the ground in the process, so that was a good start.

I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on this important matter. The provision of emergency healthcare must be fit for purpose for every person who resides in Northern Ireland or visits here as a tourist or on business. With the temporary closure of the City Hospital emergency department, everyone knew that additional pressures would be placed on the two remaining type 1 emergency care departments in the Belfast Trust area. That change is coupled with what is traditionally one of the busiest times for emergency departments — Mr McCallister and Ms Ramsey mentioned winter pressures. However, from my experience last year working in the trust, I can say that we had fewer people at the emergency department because of the extreme weather conditions. So, winter pressure does not necessarily coincide with extreme weather conditions.

The staff on the front line must be congratulated on the care and dedication —

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

**Ms P Bradley:** Yes, certainly.

**Mr McCarthy:** Why are officials continually telling the public that it is because of continued winter pressures that we have this problem?

**Ms P Bradley:** What I said, if the Member would listen, is that it is not necessarily due to extreme weather conditions. In extreme weather conditions, people traditionally do not leave the house. Therefore, there are fewer people with fractures going to hospital. We still have cold conditions; people still live in their home in cold conditions. There are still illnesses — for example, respiratory illnesses — that are

exacerbated by cold conditions. Therefore, winter pressures are a reality, not fiction. If you don't mind, I will continue.

The staff on the front line must be congratulated on the care and dedication that they have shown to the people of Northern Ireland in providing this vital service. We must ensure that, when we hold the system to account, we do it in such a way that we do not demoralise this section of a vital workforce. The system, however, can do only so much to reduce waiting times at the point of delivery. Invariably, if a person presents at an emergency department with a non-emergency condition, they will and should have to wait longer to be seen. The public have a duty to ensure that they access the most appropriate place for treatment. Although that may be difficult to identify in some circumstances, research suggests that people present at emergency departments as they cannot gain access to their GP in a timely manner. That needs to be addressed. GPs and minor injury units also have a vital role to play. They must ensure that their patients and the communities that they serve know where they can attend and when it is appropriate to attend.

The Department must work in conjunction with the Public Health Agency to ensure that the public are aware of their role in helping with the smooth running of the emergency departments in particular and of the entire health service. The 'Transforming Your Care' document placed the individual squarely at the centre of our health service. Every individual has a right to expect the very best from our health service, but they also have a high level of responsibility to ensure that their actions and choices do not place the health service under any more unnecessary strain.

Changing demographics mean that over the next number of years more demands will be placed on the health service as a whole and on the emergency section of medicine in particular. Some of the changes that we have made, such as the temporary closure of Belfast City Hospital, have had to be done sooner than expected to ensure the public have access to the very best medical care. Ultimately, the staff who are employed to work in this area are committed to providing high standards. Having worked in the health service, I have some understanding of the motivations and values that people who enter this occupation have.

We cannot ignore failings when they occur, and critical self-examination is an important part of ensuring that the health service continues to be a service that we as a country can be proud of. I welcome the Minister's announcement of the creation of an action group that will be tasked with reducing waiting times and improving the care that patients can expect to avail themselves of. The tragic cases over recent weeks show us that we must ensure that lessons, if they are present, can be learned and we can endeavour to minimise the risk of such incidents happening again. Sadly, the temporary closure of the City Hospital emergency department has placed the remaining emergency departments under a degree of strain. The closure could not be avoided, due to the staffing issues that were present.

I support the motion, recognising that people should not attend an emergency department unless it is an urgent situation. They should instead take advice from those in the community, such as pharmacists, GPs, out-of-hours services and minor injury units across the healthcare system. I also welcome moves by the Minister in appointing the action



group to address a wide range of issues that can impact on waiting time.

In Northern Ireland, we are very fortunate: we have universal healthcare that is free at the point of delivery. I want to see us continuing to provide that service to all the people in Northern Ireland in the very best way possible.

**Mr Durkan:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion, which was obviously precipitated by the tragic death of a gentleman alone on a trolley in the accident and emergency unit of the Royal Victoria Hospital, news of which broke last week. I take the opportunity to offer our condolences and apologies to the man's family, whose grief has been compounded by the circumstances of his passing and the subsequent media attention. Perhaps, however, they may take some modicum of comfort if his death is not in vain and provides the wake-up call needed for us to tackle the malaise in our healthcare system that is most evident on the front line in our A&E services. That tragic event has highlighted, as if that were needed, the fact that there is something chronically wrong with the A&E unit at the Royal. Today, the Health Committee visited the unit, and we were impressed both by the unit itself and by the diligence of its staff. However, it has become evident over past weeks that it is not working and needs to be fixed. We need to restore public confidence and can only do so by restoring staff morale.

Unfortunately, the situation at the Royal is something of a microcosm of the unacceptable situation in A&Es across the North. We have to ask why that is and then tackle the causes. There are too many people presenting at A&E who, quite frankly, have no need to be there. A 2008 review indicated that attendances at A&E here were 20% to 30% higher than elsewhere in these islands. Could that have anything to do with the appointments system operated by GP surgeries, where people have to wait three or four days for an urgent appointment? I acknowledge the statement from the BMA at the weekend that GPs can play a vital role in reducing the logjam at our emergency units: they certainly can, and they certainly should.

#### 4.45 pm

Healthcare must be looked at as an entire system rather than in silos. Have we work to do on the management and marketing of our out-of-hours services? Where are the blockages elsewhere in our hospitals that prevent people being moved through the system and into a bed? Do we have enough beds? Why do we not have enough doctors and consultants in acute medicine? That is the reason used as justification for reducing the number of units, which we had been assured would ultimately result in better care.

**Mr McCallister:** I am grateful to the Member. Does he agree with my point that you cannot change those services until you have new ones in place? If you have better out-of-hours systems, people must know to go to them and the best place to access them. Other things not being in place is what is driving such a massive influx into our A&Es.

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

**Mr Durkan:** I concur with the Member and, indeed, will address that later. We have a lot to do regarding education of the general public here.

Despite protestations, it seems that the closure of the unit at the City Hospital has not corresponded with an improvement in care at the Royal. People living in areas where the A&E unit is under threat will be extremely hard to convince that closures are for their benefit. Alcohol plays a major role in the pressures in our system, and any initiative to curb it will be most welcome. Education of the public is vital. Do not turn up unless you need to. As Ms Bradley pointed out, the Public Health Agency has a very important role to play.

Let me be clear: the failings here are with the system and not the staff. Nurses and doctors on the front line are nothing short of heroic. They run a gauntlet of abuse from drunken louts and ever-increasing scrutiny from the Department, the media and us. That compounds unimaginably what must already be one of the most stressful and highly pressured jobs in the world: literally saving lives every day and night. I have engaged with many health professionals over the past number of weeks. They are 100% dedicated to their work, but practically every one of them I spoke to pointed to a lack of resources. A shortage of nurses has been exacerbated by recruitment freezes and vacancy control. How many qualified, highly skilled nurses have left Northern Ireland to work elsewhere? The shortage of nurses is impacting on the mental and physical health of existing nurses, and they feel that it also compromises the care that they can give.

The Budget that the Assembly passed last year made this situation inevitable. The SDLP voted against it because of the ultimate consequences that it would have for front line services. We were told that it would not have those consequences. The next few years will see ever-increasing savings demanded of trusts and ever-increasing cuts as a result. Yes, there is fat in the system, but we are cutting into the bone. While the Minister must play the hand that was dealt to him in the Budget, he has the chance to come up trumps with the wild card afforded —

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

**Mr Durkan:** — to him by the Compton report. We have been given assurances that funding will be made available to enable the transition from our current model to the one envisaged by Compton. I ask the Minister to look at the allocation of that funding very carefully.

**Mr McCarthy:** I am very grateful that the Minister, the man responsible for the mess that we are in, is in the Chamber today to hear the concerns expressed on behalf of our constituents. We demand that he acts immediately to get on top of this disaster before it gets worse.

The Minister's latest efforts, which were announced on Wednesday 21 March, simply must show results sooner rather than later, if further deaths due to patients waiting for long hours on trolleys, and build-ups in corridors or cupboards are to end. Failing that, the Minister or his senior officials must step aside and install people who, as the Chairperson of the Health Committee said, can regain the confidence of the patients, public and staff.

In his latest action plan, the Minister expects 95% of patients to be admitted or discharged within four hours. We applaud that. Let us hope that it happens. If that does not happen, let someone else take over the reins to see that it does happen. Some people will not agree with what I am going to say, but the people of Northern Ireland owe a great

debt of gratitude to our local media — papers, radio, TV and other outlets — including the staff at the Royal and other hospitals, for the relentless campaign to get all patients the service to which they are entitled. Cover-ups must be a thing of the past. If the case of that unfortunate patient who died almost unnoticed on a trolley in a corridor in the Royal hospital had not been highlighted, we would not have seen an action plan, and we would not have seen red faces in the Department. Like Mark Durkan, I offer sincere sympathy to the family of that gentleman on their sad loss and hope that he will not have died in vain but that his passing will have made the necessary improvements to see better treatment in all our hospitals.

The Assembly recently gave a guarded welcome to the 'Transforming Your Care' report. I sincerely hope that changes can be brought about to provide a better all-round health service. However, we have had such reports before, and look at the mess we are in today. The report relies heavily on our GPs taking on a great deal more work, but will they be able to cope? That question has to be answered. Our community pharmacies are expected to take on a great deal more work, and look at how the Department has treated them after two lost judicial reviews. The Department is sitting back and allowing our best pharmacies to go down the tubes before they even get an opportunity to provide that extra service to our population.

The premature closure of the City Hospital has been a total disaster. Anyone with a brain would have known or should have known that 40,000 patients would have to go somewhere. It is totally obvious that this was a premature and wrong decision, certainly until proper provision was available somewhere else. Where does the Minister stand on his statement to the Assembly on 13 September 2011? The first paragraph stated that the emergency department in the City Hospital would close "on a temporary basis". I have heard his colleague use that term on a number of occasions. That decision was taken by the Belfast Trust on 7 September. Was that fact, or was it deliberate misinformation to soften the blow? We need an answer.

Our Health Committee received a letter recently from a staff member in the Royal Victoria Hospital. He said that things are really awful and patients wait for days on trolleys and chairs. He said that he has seen junior doctors in tears and staff shouting at each other. As a junior doctor in the Royal, he said that he has no voice. He said that it was only a matter of time before someone came to serious harm in the A&E department. Well, unfortunately, a gentleman has come to harm. How many more?

Minister, please listen to the cry from your staff. Until the crisis is over, please get more staff, more space and more beds at the earliest possible opportunity. I fully support the motion.

**Mr Dunne:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the issue, which has attracted a lot of media attention in recent days. Having visited the Royal's emergency department with the Health Committee this morning, I was able to see much of the good, constructive work that was going on. There is no doubt that pressure is being placed on the A&E department of the Royal and that staff have to work in difficult circumstances.

I commend the Minister for taking action last week and setting up an improvement action group, which has been tasked with tackling the current problems with waiting lists. Today we saw at first hand the lean exercise that has gone on in the Department. Staff at all levels, right down to junior members of staff, have been asked to identify areas requiring action. That is good work, and we commend the Minister for taking that initiative.

It is right — it was said here earlier — that we pass on our sympathies to the unfortunate families that have been treated in an unsatisfactory way in recent days. However, it is important that we remember that the vast majority of those who visit our hospitals regularly in Northern Ireland are generally satisfied with the care in our hospital service. The main problems relate to getting into the system. Waiting lists to see consultants and to get treatment are too long, and waiting times for A&E in some trust areas are poor and unacceptable.

It has to be recognised that 54,705 patients went through A&E units throughout the country in February 2012. Some 73.3% were dealt with within four hours. The Royal Victoria Hospital had 7,587 patients through its A&E in February, averaging 260 people a day. That highlights the scale of the operation in A&E and puts into perspective the demand on our A&E service. Almost 5,000 patients were seen and dealt with within four hours; 2,307 were treated within a period of between four and 12 hours; and 399 patients waited for over 12 hours, which is a cause for serious concern and needs to be addressed. It should also be noted that 75 more patients had to wait in excess of 12 hours in the Ulster Hospital in February. It is our local hospital and the hospital that serves the majority of the people in my North Down constituency. In the Ulster Hospital, 474 patients had to wait in excess of 12 hours, and, in the Royal, the total was 399.

Staffing in the hospital service is critical, and I have raised it during the three Health Committee sessions on the Compton report. The Royal A&E has 87 nursing posts, and I understand that there are 13 vacancies, which are in the process of being filled. Staff morale is vital to providing a quality service, and I was impressed by the professionalism and commitment from all grades today. It was also mentioned during our visit that the recent negative media focus on the Royal has had a demoralising effect on staff. Thankfully, however, staff sickness has not been significantly affected. It was noteworthy when talking to the director of acute services, Patricia Donnelly, that they had received more positive feedback on the standard of care in the A&E in the past few weeks than they have had for a very long time.

Everyone recognises that the performance of the A&E is very much subject to the performance of other processes in the hospital system. Other issues that need to be addressed such as the efficiency of the release of patients from hospital — trying to get as many patients out in the mornings, rather than the afternoons — the internal pharmacy system and ambulance availability need to be looked at to resolve the bottlenecks in the Royal Victoria Hospital.

There is a wider issue, and, as was said, we need to keep focused on making sure that those who do not need to go to the A&E department in the first instance do not go. It was mentioned today during a visit by a health professional that

30% of the people arriving at A&E should not be there and should be treated elsewhere in the system.

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

**Mr Dunne:** The recent Compton report will go some way to resolving those issues. I support the motion.

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I pass on my condolences and those of my party to the family of the man who died in the Royal a number of weeks ago. He happened to be lying on a trolley for 20-odd hours, waiting to be transferred. It is very sad for the family, but I am sure that it is also very sad for the hospital staff, who are very dedicated people. I commend them for all their hard work and endeavours. I am sure that they do not want to see such a thing happen on their watch or during their shift, especially somewhere where they have to work daily.

I have been in the A&E in the Royal Hospital with my mother on many occasions over the years. My mother is still with us, thankfully, but that is down to the hard work, commitment and dedication of the staff. I commend them for that. I would never fault them, and I would not allow anyone to take their name away. You have to argue that what they do daily is second to none. I do not think you would get it anywhere else.

#### 5.00 pm

A couple of weeks ago, my colleague Sue Ramsey and I met the Belfast Trust to raise the issue from a constituency perspective. Over recent weeks and months, many people have come to our constituency offices about waiting times in the A&E at the Royal. They believe a possible reason for that is that the A&E at the City Hospital closed. I would like to hear from the Minister today exactly what the reason is. The trust assured us that the closure of the A&E at the City Hospital was not the reason and that it was down to winter pressures. Any of us who have looked out the window today or been lucky enough to take a walk will know that the winter was very mild this year. I am sure that the pressures were there. The medical people can explain to us why that was the case.

Listening to everybody who has spoken in the debate so far, I know that everybody is coming at this from the same point of view. There are issues, and those issues need to be resolved, but how do we find a way of doing that? There is an onus on the Department to come up with the right solutions, but staff members who have concerns should be listened to before the Department implements decisions. That has been a concern since the time of the previous Minister, who might not have listened to trade unions or staff members. They are the experts, working day and daily, who know exactly what many of the issues are. I hope that, through this review, the concerns of staff members, trade unions and other professional bodies are taken on board. If their concerns are addressed, hopefully that will see some of the problems that are occurring in A&Es cease.

Staff will tell you that they are under severe pressure. You just have to look at the media impact in the past week or so to see that more and more staff members — people whom we have never seen before — are coming out to speak about their concerns. That is possibly down to the

frustration that nobody seems to be listening to them. I am sure that those staff do not want to be putting their face on the TV screen, but they have come out —

**Mr B McCrea:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr P Maskey:** Certainly.

**Mr B McCrea:** I am thinking about your comments about the previous Health Minister. He did listen to the unions. He went down and talked to them. I wonder, Mr Maskey, whether it has come to you as a surprise that the A&E department is so hard-pressed. It was said that there were going to be problems, but the situation seems to have caught people by surprise. Why do you think that is?

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

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat. I remember going to an A&E years ago when I had an accident. I waited hours and hours and hours. It is not a new problem that people are waiting any length of time in an A&E. It has been an ongoing problem for many years. Some of us will have brought our kids to A&E and have had to wait sometimes for 10 or 12 hours. It is not a new problem.

Of course there are pressures. Of course people have concerns. Sometimes, the people who raise the issues are raising them for the right reasons. That is why I am talking about staff members. Staff will tell you whether or not Michael McGimpsey met them, but did he listen? We still have the same problem. That shows the importance of today's debate. I hope that the Department takes on board the concerns that staff have, listens to those staff who have spoken to the media in recent days and listens to the trade unions and the patients. Patients are key to all this. Although we have staff and hospitals, it is the patients who must come to the fore. I hope that we work to achieve that and listen to all concerned.

It will not be easy. This is not an easy problem; rather, it is a generational problem. I hope that the pressures that we see, whether in the media or, hopefully, through the Committee and the Minister himself, will ease in the very near future. That would allow a bit of breathing space to let the Department, officials, staff members, doctors and nurses provide a 100% assurance to patients that they are there to treat the patient, there to ensure the best for the patient and there to deliver a first-class service.

**Ms Brown:** As a member of the Health Committee, I am speaking in support of this motion. I recognise the unprecedented pressures faced by medical staff at the Royal Victoria Hospital. I am very concerned by developments there, just as I was concerned, and continue to be, about similar pressure some weeks ago at the accident and emergency department in Antrim in my constituency.

In the first instance, I pay tribute to all staff, who have been working under immense pressure in our health service in recent times. Their dedication and commitment serves as an inspiration to us all.

It is clear that the systems in place for dealing with demand over a specified period have been stretched to their absolute limits. In a statement released to the media on Wednesday 21 March, Minister Poots stated:

*"I will not accept poor or sub-standard services in our hospitals."*

That is a statement from a Minister who is not going to stand idly by and let such a situation continue. Therefore, he has my confidence, despite the abuse that he has received from some of the media.

I look forward to the outcome of the review into the situation at the Royal by the action group established by the Health and Social Care Board along with the Public Health Agency. I know that the Committee will take a keen interest in their findings. Therefore, I support the initiatives announced by the Minister and encourage him in driving change throughout the entire health and social care sector.

'Transforming Your Care: A Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland' was published in December 2011. What we have witnessed over the past number of months, be it in the Royal or the Antrim Area Hospital, is a demonstration of the need for the recommendations in that review to be implemented. Furthermore, as the motion highlights, we need to see a reduction in the number of people attending accident and emergency for non-urgent health issues. We cannot have people attending accident and emergency departments with medical concerns that could be adequately addressed in the community, either at a person's local medical centre or at their local pharmacy. That will require not only a culture change for those in wider society but among all those in the service, as the review highlights. Such change could be brought about by education, either through our schools, a media campaign for the wider public or a new initiative, such as the idea presented to the Health Committee last week of introducing a new three-digit phone number, 111, for non-emergency situations in an attempt to end the habit of the public using 999 for any situation. Of course, that is just one of the many ideas brought forward by those who work in the service and who see the difficulties at first hand.

I urge administrators and those with responsibility to do their utmost to encourage new thinking and practices that will lift our health service out of this seemingly endless cycle of lurching from one crisis to another. We must take the hard decisions now in an attempt to halt the slide.

I am conscious that the recent chaos in A&E departments can put off those who need urgent care going straight there, leaving them in a worse state than they were to begin with. Therefore, we need to reassure the public that that issue will be addressed. We also need to ensure that people will not suffer further stress and illness as a result of delays once they arrive at the hospital. It is not enough to accept that waiting for several hours is the norm and that endless hours on trolleys in corridors is something that has to be endured. Confidence needs to be built in the health service as a whole, and it may take some time for those reforms to be put in place. Most importantly, however, it requires the assistance of more than one person or agency. I urge the Minister to act with urgency and continue to make the difficult decisions that will, ultimately, benefit all those who genuinely need an effective and efficient A&E department when the need arises.

**Mr Gardiner:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on this matter. From the outset, I want to make it clear that the motion is not criticising the nurses, doctors and staff who

do a very good job under very difficult circumstances at the Royal Victoria Hospital. I was in the Royal Victoria Hospital this morning with members of the Health Committee, and we could see that, when the service is running smoothly, it works very well. However, today's debate focuses on what happened in the Royal over the past number of months. The issue has been well covered by the media over recent weeks. Some of the stories of personal experiences have been extremely concerning, and even the most hardened observers would have done well not to have been moved by some of the individual stories. Although many of the individual reports have been shocking, I accept that most have received adequate treatment, albeit they have had to wait for far too long.

The Department set an ambitious target. As from April 2010, 95% of the patients were to be treated and discharged or admitted within four hours of their arrival at the accident and emergency department, with no patients waiting longer than 12 hours. This target has not been met. Last month alone, 399 patients at the Royal Victoria Hospital had to wait for more than 12 hours.

The Ulster Unionist Party opposed aspects of the 2011-15 Budget last year. We said at the time that we were most concerned about funding for our health service, and we were accused of scaremongering. However, we are now in the situation in Northern Ireland where, having come through one of the mildest winters on record, our accident and emergency system seems to be on the brink of collapse. It was not only the Royal that seemed to have been caught unprepared but the A&E department at the Mater Hospital, the Ulster Hospital and Antrim Area Hospital.

I would appreciate it if the Minister could address a number of things in his response, the first being staffing levels. Is there any basis for claims that nurses' shifts have been going unfilled in the Royal Victoria Hospital? If so, how many shifts does he believe to have been affected and what action has he taken subsequently to ensure that this never happens again? Will the Minister detail when his Department first became aware of the problems with the accident and emergency department at the Royal? I know his Department has strong monitoring arrangements in place, but unless these issues are acted on, that monitoring will have been in vain.

I have some concerns about the Compton proposals for the future of acute services in Northern Ireland, not least the support they give to reducing the number of acute hospitals to between five and seven. We saw what happened when the Belfast City Hospital accident and emergency unit closed. Funding reductions might have notable impacts on the operation of the service. Meeting targets is difficult enough at the best of times. However, as the Health Department moves forward with limited resources, I am very concerned about whether it has the ability, the sense of urgency or the appreciation that change is needed and needed now.

**Mr G Robinson:** I pay tribute to the dedicated staff who work in A&E departments throughout Northern Ireland. If everyone believed the reports of the sensationalist media, A&E staff would feel that they are not appreciated. Staff at A&E do a fantastic job that few people can do or would want to do, and I salute their diligence in the face of adversity, verbal abuse and even, on occasions, physical abuse, which the Health Minister alluded to during Question Time today.

In an A&E in my constituency, the hours of opening and excellent services provided are achieved mainly by the use of locum staff. This has been relayed directly to me by the CEO of the Northern Trust. This fact points to one thing; a lack of trained A&E staff available to take up full-time posts. Locum staff are not employed on a permanent contract by any trust in Northern Ireland. In Belfast, the same situation applies as applies in East Londonderry, and this was the primary reason behind the temporary closure of the City Hospital's A&E department. It also ensured a safer service for the patients.

We must all remember that our Health Minister, like all Ministers, is faced with a large deficit in his budget due to a £4 billion cut in the block grant imposed by the Conservative Government. I would welcome it if those who tabled the motion could come up with the qualified staff required to solve the problem, as, I am sure, would the Health Minister. I understand that all efforts are being made to employ full-time staff. The Minister recently restated that. It will take time to achieve the recruitment of these medical staff.

### 5.15 pm

I also stress that there must be a full appraisal of how people who turn up at A&E departments are treated in order to ensure that A&E treatment is available for major life-threatening conditions such as injuries sustained in road accidents or heart problems. A system where patients with minor injuries are redirected to a different facility where a nurse can discharge them would greatly help to free up A&E departments to deal with real, life-threatening emergencies. I also want to take the opportunity to express my condolences to the family of the gentleman who was found on the trolley in the Royal. I support the motion.

**Mr Allister:** We have seen and heard of some quite unbelievable scenes at the casualty department in the Royal Victoria Hospital. Scenes have been described of people who need medical attention lying on trolleys for 34 hours and of someone dying on a trolley. It is hard to comprehend that that sort of scene occurs in this part of the world in the 21st century, yet, sadly and realistically, it does occur. There has to be accountability for that because that is what the public seeks. The public pay their taxes and rates. They look for services in return. When the public discover that they are getting that level of service — for which I do not at all blame staff, who are so stretched it is unbelievable — they ask why. They ask, “Where does the buck stop?”

The buck stops in this House. It stops with the Minister. The failures of the Royal and Antrim Area Hospital are the failures of the Minister, because that is the way that accountable democracy works. This time last year, it may have seemed easy to some when the buck stopped on the Ulster Unionist Party Benches to my left. Everything was simple. Everything was easy. Now, they may be discovering that, when the buck stops on their Benches, it is not so easy. Suddenly, we hear in some of the speeches from the DUP Benches, which would have been very different this time last year —

**Mr McCallister:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he recall that, over the past year or more, Members on the DUP Benches have, indeed, congratulated themselves on how they have spread the jam? Now, we realise that it is

actually spread so thinly that the health service cannot meet the standards and demands that the Minister expects from it.

**Mr Allister:** A year ago, they were telling us that there was so much jam that it was everywhere as far as the last Minister was concerned and that the health service did not need any more cash. The reality dose that has set in is very different indeed.

Of course, today, it is everyone else's fault. They just cannot stretch it back far enough to blame direct rule, so they blame the drunks. Of course too many drunks turn up at casualty departments, but they always did. That is not the reason why we are in the turmoil that we are in today. Then, they blame people for not going to their GP. That has been a perennial problem. Yes; it is good and necessary to tackle those issues, but do not just make excuses for failure.

Anyone with a titter of wit would have known that, if you close a casualty department that has a throughput of 45,000 people a year, such as at the City Hospital, and put that burden on the two other hospitals in the city, inevitably, they would not be able to cope. My goodness, a Research and Information Service report that was done before the City Hospital's casualty department closed told us exactly what the Minister has never seemed to realise; that if it were closed, it was likely to have a huge knock-on effect on the other A&E sites in the greater Belfast area. Indeed, so it has. It is, therefore, no surprise that closing the City Hospital's casualty department “temporarily”, to use that euphemism, has created the huge knock-on effect that we have seen at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

Of course, we then have waiting times that are utterly out of control. Figures for the debate show that, in Antrim Area Hospital, only 58% of patients are seen within four hours. We know from the media that many people are not seen within that time. Let us not blame the media for putting the focus on things that are wrong. In fact, many members of the public are grateful to the media for doing that.

It might be uncomfortable for those who have to take the heat, and it might be desirable for them and their well-paid, multiple spin doctors to spin it out of existence. However, it is reality and it has to be faced, and the sooner the better.

The problem is multifaceted. I received an answer from the Minister today about the downtime of ambulances delivering people to casualty departments. To my amazement, it emerges that that downtime — the time from when patients are delivered until the clinical staff take charge — is greater than 45 minutes for 30% of patients who are delivered to the Royal Victoria Hospital. Moreover, I am told by ambulance staff that, in some cases, that downtime can run to hours. Think of it, ambulances are marooned at a hospital, unable to go anywhere else, because they cannot hand over control of their patients to clinical staff. That is an issue that undoubtedly needs attention. What this all points to is that the Minister's pursuit of the Compton review, with its crazed idea —

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

**Mr Allister:** — of reducing the number of hospitals that provide key acute services to five to seven, will visit the turmoil of the Antrim Area and the Royal Victoria hospitals right across this Province, particularly if the Minister is foolish enough to close the acute services at the Causeway Hospital.

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** I welcome the opportunity to hear the views of Members on the motion and to respond to it. At the outset, I want to express my regret at all of the deaths that have taken place in our accident and emergency unit in the Royal Victoria Hospital over the period in question. I also want to express my regret at the amount of time that some have had to wait and the conditions that some have had to wait in. We want to improve that, and I believe that we will do so. Nonetheless, it is important that we recognise that problems exist and deal with them.

I thank the Members who tabled the motion. It is sensible and rational, and I am happy to support it and to work with Members to achieve a better health service in Northern Ireland. Mr Maskey pointed out that waiting times in accident and emergency departments are nothing new, and I agree with him. Nonetheless, that does not make the situation acceptable. We need to have better waiting times and services in our accident and emergency departments. I know that it is nothing new because I have personally experienced it. In January 2009, I sat with my disabled brother from one morning to 4.00 am the following day and waited for him to receive the care that he needed before he was admitted to hospital. I sat there among the drunks and lots of others who should not have been there. On that night, three years ago, there was a red light on and they were calling for staff to come from other wards to help in the A&E unit. Waiting times are not new, but we need to work on them and improve them.

The Health Minister in 2008-09 received an uplift to his budget of some 13.5% or £500 million. Where did that money go? How was it spent? How was it that, when we got to 2011, we had not seen improvements? One would like to know how that money was spent and where it went. I believe that there is considerable money in the system. We need to ensure that we spend that money wisely and do not waste money in our health service, and it is my intention to drive out waste from the health service.

This afternoon, most Members spoke sensibly and rationally. That is, with the exception of two Members: Mr McCarthy and Mr Allister. Mr McCarthy, in true style as that of the village idiot, behaved in an opportunistic way and did not make any rational points whatsoever. Indeed, it seems that I am to blame for everything that has happened in the health service from the start, in spite of the fact that I have only held this office for nine months.

Mr Allister, on the other hand, is surprised that people die in accident and emergency units. I do not know where he has been living for the past number of years, because his comment was particularly stupid.

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

**Mr Poots:** No, I will not give way, because the Member had his opportunity. In fact, he had six minutes, and he did not make his case very well at all on this occasion.

**Mr B McCrea:** You should take him on, then.

**Mr Poots:** I am doing that right now.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Poots:** The A&E at Belfast City Hospital was not closed in the sense that its staff were discontinued. They were moved to the Mater Hospital and the Royal Victoria Hospital, so no diminution of staff took place. The logic — sometimes I wonder — of suggesting that spreading staff over three sites instead of two would make it better is totally flawed, and I am surprised that someone who claims to be very able and articulate would come off with logic of that standard. That is a complete failing on his part.

The fact of life is that we have our pressures this year, and those are significant. I will deal with the issue of winter pressures. Winter pressures happen each and every year. Some Members may think that because there was more frost in one year than there was in the next, we will have a better year. I remind Mr McCallister, as opposed to Mr Allister, of a saying in the rural community: a green Christmas makes a fat churchyard. Why do old people always refer to that? The fact of life is that green winters, or warm winters, normally lead to more deaths and illnesses than extremely cold winters. Nonetheless, we have the pressures every winter.

I want to deal with the changes that took place across the Belfast Trust. I remind Members that nine additional beds were created in the Royal Victoria Hospital and that four new short-stay units were installed in the Mater Hospital. Staffing in the Belfast City Hospital was reconfigured so that the overall staffing complement at the Royal Victoria Hospital was increased.

The accident and emergency unit at Belfast City Hospital was closed because of a lack of availability of consultants and registrars in the facility. That was in June 2011. Mr McCarthy may well think that I played some role in not appointing consultants and registrars to Belfast City Hospital, but I think that that predates my role in the health service. Therefore, he will recognise that I had absolutely nothing to do with the fact that there was an inadequate number of consultants and registrars to cover both facilities.

As a consequence, the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA) warned us that we did not have enough senior doctors on site. Therefore, we had to take steps to address that. Actions had to be taken because of circumstances in Belfast City Hospital that were beyond our control and that we inherited. It is absolutely criminal that we had a situation in which on many evenings and weekends our major trauma unit in Northern Ireland was covered by junior doctors. That is not acceptable in any respect.

Where are we going with all this? We need to make significant changes. Last week, I announced that we would be making changes to patient pathways so that patients have effective access to hospital services without having to go through emergency departments and that we would manage the waiting times for elective and other services. Long waiting times for elective care can lead to greater pressures being placed on emergency department services.

**Mr McCarthy:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Poots:** We heard enough from you earlier on.

We need a focus on discharge, right from the point of admission and throughout the patient journey, for those patients who end up being admitted. We need to look at what is being done outside hospital to ensure that people

who do not need to go to an emergency department do not end up there.

**Mr Beggs:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Poots:** I will give way to Mr Beggs because he did not make a comment, and I might get some sense from him.

**Mr Beggs:** The Minister talked about discharge pathways. Does he agree that it is unacceptable that patients who are ready for discharge have to wait for more than two weeks because of the inadequacy of the available care packages? Will he ensure that there is appropriate training of additional personnel so that more carers are available in the community and beds are not blocked because of a lack of care?

### 5.30 pm

**Mr Poots:** Yes, I agree with the Member. That is a perfectly sensible comment: that type of thing needs to be driven out of the system. We are considerably better than other parts of the UK, given that we have a joint health and social care system, but, nonetheless, that is not to say there are not failings that we need to address. Last week, I raised the issue of the important role that community care provides in all of this, and community care can indeed help.

We also need to look at the pharmacy network. We need to look at GPs and the out-of-hours services and consider whether we get a good enough service from out-of-hours doctors. If we do not, do we need to address that and change it to help ensure that we have a better reliance on primary care as opposed to people coming to accident and emergency units in the first instance? Minor injury units can be used to provide the advice and treatment that can safely be provided outside of emergency departments, and we need to ensure that suitable support arrangements are in place to facilitate early and appropriate discharge back to the community.

**Mr McCartney:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Poots:** Yes.

**Mr McCartney:** The Minister has listed a number of aspects that he thinks can help accident and emergency treatment. On Friday, I visited Altnagelvin Hospital as part of a party delegation. Will he comment on the impact that the acute medical unit is having in taking pressure off the accident and emergency department?

**Mr Poots:** By using medical assessment units, minor injuries units, the appropriate out-of-hours services and the GP system, we can reduce greatly the burdens and pressures on our health system.

As the Chairperson of the Committee said, one of the biggest problems that the emergency department at the Royal Victoria Hospital has faced over the past few days is the fact that there are pressures on the hospital itself. I will clarify for Members, in case some of them do not understand. The vast majority of Members understand and are up to speed with things, but it appears that some Members are not. No beds were closed at the Royal Victoria Hospital or at the Belfast City Hospital over the past few months, but they were all full. We need to ensure that there is a better flow of people through the hospital system, so we need to have more discharges in the mornings. We need to ensure that pharmacy can respond to the needs that

are placed on it. We need to ensure that more beds are available. If beds are not available, that will inevitably lead to trolley waits, which causes consternation and problems. That is why I propose that consultant decision-making in emergency departments about discharge is maximised and that the amount of surgery that can be done as day cases rather than for inpatients is maximised so that those beds are not taken up. I propose that we increase the proportion of patients who are discharged by lunchtime each day and that we have sufficient ward rounds — that means twice daily — to promote early discharge. We should keep only the most seriously ill waiting for investigations or procedures that could otherwise be done as an outpatient. I was approached by a Member who said that a family member was kept from Monday to Friday and got a test on the Friday. That was three or four days lost in a hospital ward, where that person did not want to be, taking up a bed that someone else needed.

We need to ensure that we permit senior nurses to discharge patients over weekends and public holidays. A point was raised about the grading of nurses. If nurses are being asked to take the responsibility, they should be paid the grade. That is very clear, and it is an investment. It is sensible that nurses take on more responsibilities that they safely can, thereby reducing the workload of doctors. It is financially sound.

There are ways of actively tackling the delays in discharge into the community, which Mr Beggs raised, and developing options to deal with the 20% to 30% of patients who turn up inappropriately at emergency departments. We can tackle that by allowing triage nurses to discharge individuals home — we would like to give them more responsibility to do that — or by providing an out-of-hours GP or minor injuries unit on the same or adjacent sites to which we can direct patients. Also, emergency departments operate for 24 hours, and it is important to consider whether other elements of hospitals can work longer than the traditional nine to five or nine to nine.

So, while it is not possible to completely eliminate the risk that sometimes things will go wrong, there are known and well-established actions and changes that can minimise the risk. I need full assurance that they are being applied.

Finally, I pay tribute to all the staff in the health and social care system. The press and media have made a constant attack on our health and social care system. I know that Mr McCarthy maybe likes our staff being attacked, but I do not. I do not like to see people who work extremely hard in the system to care for people attacked on a constant basis by elements in the media. They do a wonderful job in difficult circumstances. They need our support. They do not need people to drive their morale down; they need encouragement for the work that they do. We need to respond to their needs.

I called down last Thursday unannounced, without any officials, and had a long conversation with staff in the Royal Victoria Hospital emergency department. They were very clear that they do not like the constant attacks on them. They want support and help, and they want people to listen. I welcome the fact that most of the comments in the House today have been about how we can resolve issues and how we can work together to do it. I thank all Members who want to work positively for a better health service in Northern Ireland for their contributions.

**Mr B McCrea:** First, I have a declaration: my partner is a nurse; her sister is a nurse; her sister's husband is a renal technician; my brother-in-law is chief executive of a health trust; and one of my daughters is a junior doctor. It is fair to say that I get a fair amount of information about the health service.

**Ms S Ramsey:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr B McCrea:** If you will not be long.

**Ms S Ramsey:** Did the Member ask me to explain what a band 5 was so that he could have that conversation when he gets home?

**Mr B McCrea:** The Member knows why I asked that question. However, I want to be serious.

Some people in my party do not think that we can do opposition and do not think that we have it in us to point out when something is wrong. They do not think that we have the ability to take a Minister to task when he has been in the job not nine months but 10 months, which have been 10 months of shame. There is a list of things that have gone wrong. Had it been the other way round, all the people over there would not be nodding, saying what a wonderful job the Minister has done and saying that the people are wrong. They would be lined up to say, "No, the Minister is wrong". There are people in this party, including my colleague Mr McCallister, who are more than able to take on Ministers who fail in their duty and who should stand up and take responsibility for their actions. I cannot understand how a Minister who was able to talk on 9 March 2011 with all sorts of colourful imagery about how bad the previous Minister was will not take interventions from people who wish to debate the issues with him. Is he not able to sustain an argument? Does he not know the answers to the questions? He asks the rhetorical question, "Where did all the money go?". Well, he is the Minister; he should know.

As many people have pointed out, this has not suddenly come out of nowhere. Mr Maskey talked about times when he had taken people down and waited. We have all talked about those issues, yet we seem to have a crisis. Why has that crisis come on your watch, Minister? What has happened since you took over? It was interesting that Mr Maskey said that people should listen. It is not the previous Minister who was not listening: it is this Minister and his colleagues. We warned and warned and warned that there were insufficient resources to do the job properly and that people would be at risk. I heard many blandishments from people around here who seemed to say that the public are at fault because 30% of them should not turn up. If you go down that route, some person who should have gone to hospital and did not will face really serious problems. You really need to encourage people. Whenever they feel that they are ill, they should go and get medical attention. It is not for us to tell them not to go. You should get a service in place so that you can filter out what needs to be done efficiently and what needs to be done early. It is a question of more efficient triage. Why can we not find out when people come in whether they need emergency treatment, to be talked to and sat down for a while or to be told that they would be better off going somewhere else? Why can we not manage it whenever people get to the door? Why do we have to say to people, "Do not come, make it up yourselves, take the risk"? That is totally contrary to all the advice that we

give. Normally, what we say to people is, "If you are in doubt, check it out. Go and see what has to happen".

I say this in defence of Mr McCarthy: the Minister retaliated but would not let him intervene. Mr McCarthy said that the man responsible for the mess was in the Chamber. He pointed the finger at the Minister. It is the Minister. It is democratic responsibility. You are accountable. When you start making assertions that heads will roll if somebody does not do something, it is your head that should roll. You should actually stand up and be counted. Frankly, what you are doing is obfuscating and ducking your responsibilities.

The Minister can sit here and smirk and say that it does not really matter, but even his own colleagues were talking. Mr Dunne came up with a series of statistics, all of which were very disturbing. Particularly disturbing was the statistic that 399 people waited for over 12 hours. That is absolutely outrageous. What, Minister, are you going to do about that? Ms Brown talked about issues to do with Antrim. She said that heads must roll. I agree with her: his head should roll. He has not been able to deliver. A year ago, he was talking the big talk, saying, "I am going to do this, I am going to do that, I am going to make decisions". We have seen what happened when you made decisions — absolute chaos. The absolute destruction of the NHS — that is what you are responsible for. That is what you have taken on board. When you go through all the stuff on the record, you, Minister, should be ashamed of yourself.

My colleague Mr Gardiner highlighted the fact that we have been saying consistently that we need more funding. It is on the record. Radical changes need to be made to the way our services are delivered and configured, but we need the money and resources. Not so, said Mr Poots. We were told there is more money than you know what to do with, if only you would come along and make a few touches to the tiller, things would be all right. We see now what that has led us to. This is something that we, collectively, have to make sure is not allowed to continue.

When it comes to providing opposition and pointing out when people are not doing their job, we should not sit idly by and come out with bland statements saying that things are OK. There was the nonsense that he had at the end about placing it on record that attacks on staff are most unwarranted: nobody was attacking staff. Everybody was 100% behind them. Mr Robinson, I think, mentioned the scurrilous media that seemed to have a campaign against the DUP and the Minister. Nonsense.

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

**Mr B McCrea:** I will indeed.

**Mr McCarthy:** Does the Member agree — this is the question that I wanted to ask the Minister — that, had it not been for the media and the outrage of the people of Northern Ireland, the Minister's announcement of an action plan would simply not have happened? He was gliding along as quietly as possible. The fact that the media have come to the fore brought us to where we are today, and we will hopefully see improvements.

**5.45 pm**

**Mr B McCrea:** I thank Mr McCarthy for his intervention. I was hoping that he would take the opportunity, because he



made some telling points earlier. That is the real tragedy in all of this.

The DUP spin machine says, "What a marvellous Minister. He is listening. He will take decisions. Things are tough, but you can be sure that Mr Poots is at the helm and things are fine". I dread to think what would have happened if even one of the regrettable incidents that have happened in the past 10 months had happened on our watch. The outrage that would have come from those Benches would have been nothing ordinary. I actually thought that there would be more from Mr Poots, that he would stand up and say, "Mea culpa. I got it wrong. There was a mistake. We do need more money. We should go to Executive colleagues and come back and say that this is the way that we want to go forward". It is really disappointing that a man of his experience and long standing in the Assembly will not engage in debate. When Mr Allister put forward various points and said that so many unbelievable things had happened, Mr Poots should have said that that was not the case and that he was able to defend the point. However, he could not or would not. He should have. The real measure of Ministers is whether they are able to stand up when the question is asked. When people look at the debate and hear what everybody has to say, they want to hear more than bland statements and Members saying that they do not know what happened. Ms Bradley talked about winter, and we had a discussion about it. Between her and the Minister, I am not sure whether we want a cold winter or not. There used to be different issues, including flu and orthopaedics. We look at the demand year in, year out, and there are peaks at certain times of the year. We should manage those peaks. If you close one A&E, only an idiot is surprised that the demand goes up elsewhere. That is the real issue.

The Minister is culpable and responsible. If heads are to roll, one should be his. I support the motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That this Assembly recognises the unprecedented pressures currently being placed on the accident and emergency department at the Royal Victoria Hospital; notes with concern that staff are working in extremely challenging circumstances and the impact that this has on staff and patients; accepts the recommendation contained in the recent review of the provision of health and social care that the Department should encourage only people in need of emergency treatment to attend accident and emergency departments; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to review urgently the services at the Royal Victoria Hospital, to ensure that the necessary permanent staff are employed on an effective and efficient basis to allow the smooth operation of the accident and emergency department.*

*Adjourned at 5.47 pm.*



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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 27 March 2012

*The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair).*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## Assembly Business

**Mr A Maginness:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Yesterday, during the debate on the emergency service at the Royal Victoria Hospital, the Minister of Health referred to Mr McCarthy, a Member for Strangford, in the following terms:

*"Mr McCarthy, in true style as that of the village idiot, behaved in an opportunistic way and did not make any rational points whatsoever."*

I believe that the use of the term "village idiot" was contemptible, offensive, demeaning and outrageously hurtful. I ask you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to look at the remark, rule on it and, if you find my argument coherent and convincing, ask the Minister to withdraw that offensive remark and apologise to the Member, who is a respected Member of the House and should not be treated in such a shabby way.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I remind all Members that they should treat all other Members with respect in everything that they say, particularly in the Chamber. The Member has raised the matter, of which there will be a record in Hansard, and the Speaker will have an opportunity to review it.

**Mr McCarthy:** Further to that point of order — I thank the Member for raising it — I honestly did not hear the comment at the time because I was so engrossed in the subject that we were discussing, which is so important. I think that, when someone resorts to that type of language, they are losing the argument. In fact, on that occasion, the argument was lost.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member has made his point.

## Ministerial Statement

### North/South Ministerial Council: Trade and Business Development

**Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):** Mr Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, regarding a meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in trade and business development sectoral format.

The meeting was held in the offices of the North/South Ministerial Council in Armagh on Thursday 1 March 2012. The Executive were represented by me in my capacity as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and by John O'Dowd MLA, Minister of Education. The Irish Government were represented by Richard Bruton TD, Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. The statement has been agreed with the Minister of Education, and I make it on behalf of us both.

Ministers welcomed the recently appointed chairperson, Martin Cronin, and vice chairperson, Joanne Spain, to their first NSMC meeting. The Council noted the planned retirement of the chief executive officer, Liam Nellis, and thanked him for his commitment and contribution to the work of InterTradelreland.

The chairperson and the CEO updated Ministers on InterTradelreland's performance and business activities. Of particular note in 2011 was the generation of £119.8 million of business value from companies participating in trade and innovation programmes and the fact that 2,576 companies have participated in InterTradelreland trade and innovation programmes and accessed cross-border business information and advice services.

Ministers discussed the recommendations highlighted in an InterTradelreland report, 'All Island Public Procurement: A Competitiveness Study'. We noted the establishment of a North/South working group to take forward actions to improve the visibility and accessibility of the £18 billion public procurement market — a key driver of demand in the economy — and the capability of small and medium-sized enterprises to win tenders on a cross-border basis.

The Council noted ongoing and future initiatives developed by InterTradelreland to encourage and stimulate greater co-operation to increase applications to European Union framework programmes, including enhanced levels of SME participation. InterTradelreland analysis shows that 137

collaborative applications have proved successful, securing funding of €40 million for 50 proposals.

Ministers welcomed the continued success and development of the US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership, including the recent extension to include telecommunications and energy and sustainability. The Council noted InterTradelreland's draft annual report and accounts for 2011. The Council approved Tourism Ireland's business plan 2012 and recommended that the budget provision for 2012 be €62.7 million. The Council agreed to meet in trade and business development sectoral format in autumn 2012.

I commend the statement to the Assembly.

**Mr A Maginness (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment):** I thank the Minister for her very comprehensive report on the meeting. I note the retirement of the CEO of InterTradelreland, Mr Liam Nellis, and take the opportunity to pay tribute to him and his leadership over many years and wish him well in his retirement. I am sure that the Minister shares those sentiments.

InterTradelreland is a very important element in economic recovery. I note the £119 million of value that has been generated from companies associated with InterTradelreland. Will the Minister advise the House whether there was any discussion of how to develop that further so as to increase the impact of trade between North and South and through InterTradelreland?

**Mrs Foster:** I thank the Chair for his comments, particularly those relating to the CEO, who tells me that he is looking forward to spending more time on the golf course. Undoubtedly, he will be with us for the Irish Open.

We had a discussion about how InterTradelreland can add value to the work, in our case, of Invest Northern Ireland and make sure that there is no duplication of the work carried out by both bodies. Subsequent to the Council meeting, I met the new chairperson, Martin Cronin, and he, too, is keen to ensure that the work that InterTradelreland delivers in Northern Ireland will add value, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses that, perhaps, Invest Northern Ireland has not traditionally worked with.

I referred to the amount of value that we were able to deliver through the work of InterTradelreland. For me, the fact that we had 68 companies participating that were first-time innovators is very important, as is the figure of 62 companies exporting for the first time. As the Member will know, we have stringent targets for more exports from Northern Ireland right across the world, but, of course, a lot of our first-time exporters export to the Republic of Ireland, and I am sure it is the same vice versa.

I look forward to working with the new chair and, indeed, with new and existing members of the board. I also look forward to the appointment of the new chief executive, which we hope will take place before the autumn.

**Mr Moutray:** I thank the Minister for bringing the statement to the House. Will she outline how InterTradelreland can further help local companies to procure contracts with the Republic of Ireland?

**Mrs Foster:** That will be done by making sure that our programmes are such that they will help small businesses in Northern Ireland. I am fond of the Go-2-Tender programme that InterTradelreland developed because that assists our companies to look at the public procurement market in the Republic of Ireland. There have been quite innovative ways in which InterTradelreland has tried to assist small companies, not least through trying to develop an app for iPhones. It has developed a version of the app for Android phones, which we hope will be launched quite soon.

We are doing all that we can to ensure that small and medium-sized companies are aware of the opportunities available to them in the public procurement market in the Republic of Ireland. We want to make sure that, in the words we used at the Council meeting, they have visibility and accessibility but also the capability to apply to those public procurement markets. I hope that InterTradelreland will be able to assist companies to reach all three of those targets so that we can assist them in a very meaningful way.

**Mr McKay:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. I welcome the work that InterTradelreland is doing to increase applications to the EU framework programme. The Committee is looking at that as part of its inquiry into research and development. Some stakeholders said that Enterprise Ireland put greater focus on that than Invest NI in the North. Will Invest NI change that focus and consider working with Enterprise Ireland to carry out work that would be of benefit to both jurisdictions?

**Mrs Foster:** I have no difficulty in saying that Invest NI already works with Enterprise Ireland and has no difficulty in working with Enterprise Ireland in relation to the innovation sector. As I said in my response to the Chairman's question, it is important that bodies do not duplicate the work of each other but instead take forward programmes that we need to take forward.

I am pleased to say that under the auspices of InterTradelreland we have again invited Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn to Belfast in June, when we hope to have another meaningful engagement with her. Again, we will focus on small and medium-sized companies, as we did on the last occasion that we spoke to her. However, we need to make sure that Horizon 2020 takes account of the fact that small companies have found it difficult to engage with FP7. We are looking forward to that engagement in June, but I say to the Member that it is important that we do not duplicate each other's work and instead take advantage of the value added.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Again, I thank the Minister for the update on the meeting. With regard to procurement and tenders, I wonder whether the Minister had an opportunity at the meeting to discuss an issue raised in a House of Commons report today from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on fuel fraud, in which the Committee expressed bitter disappointment that authorities either side of the border have been unable to bring forward a single tender procedure for a marker for rebated diesel?

**10.45 am**

**Mrs Foster:** I know I have great powers, but I do not know how I would have been able to have a discussion on 1 March about a report that comes out today. It is amazing that the Member should seek to know whether I have discussed a report that is only out today. However, the

issue is a serious one. It is an issue that I wrote to the Northern Ireland Select Committee about, because I have had representations from councils about it. I very much look forward to reading the report when I receive it today.

**Mr McCarthy:** I thank the Minister for her statement and welcome the progress made to date. I notice that the Minister said that she wanted to avoid duplication. Of course, we welcome that. Are any efforts being made to reduce bureaucracy and red tape, particularly for new small businesses on both sides of the border?

**Mrs Foster:** I thank the Member for his question. A lot of the effort of InterTradelreland is on trying to make things easier for a lot of our small and medium-sized companies. That is the whole idea behind the development of apps for mobile phones and the new app that we are developing for Android phones. The whole idea behind its programmes, whether it is the Go-2-Tender programme, the Fusion programme or the Acumen programme, is to make things easy for a company.

Some of the framework 7 difficulties have centred on bureaucracy and form filling, and that is an issue that we hope to raise yet again with the European Commissioner when she visits us in June.

**Mr Dunne:** I thank the Minister for her statement. How can InterTradelreland help SMEs to get involved in innovation?

**Mrs Foster:** There are a number of programmes from InterTradelreland that help companies get involved in innovation. I have visited some of those companies and have seen first-hand the benefits of those programmes. The Fusion and Acumen programmes really try to encourage small companies to take advantage. The Fusion programme allows a graduate to work in a firm for a period of time. When I visited Augher creamery, I was told that the company had been able to use the graduate to full effect and had retained the graduate after the programme had finished. Indeed, on many occasions, graduates who are placed as a result of InterTradelreland programmes are kept on in the business, and that is a good indicator of the worth of the programme, because people are retaining that member of staff.

So, there is always much more that we can do. Some of the programmes are working well, and we look forward to working with the new chairperson to identify new ways to help companies to innovate.

**Ms J McCann:** Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her statement. I want to ask her about SMEs accessing European funding, both North and South. What is the Minister's view on putting a one-stop shop in place, where small businesses could go to get advice and support and be signposted towards European funding for innovation?

**Mrs Foster:** I hope that we have been able to provide some of what the Member has been asking for through the Boosting Business scheme and Invest NI. Again, we come to the point that we should not all want InterTradelreland or Invest NI to do everything; the issue is the two agencies working together and making sure that they complement each other. If Invest NI has someone coming to it and believes that an InterTradelreland programme is better fitted to what they are doing, it should signpost the person to InterTradelreland and vice versa. That is something that I discussed with the boards of Invest NI and InterTradelreland when I came into my position back in 2008. That is working

well. Obviously, there is always room for improvement, but I reiterated that to the chairperson when I met him just last week.

**Mr McGlone:** Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle. Mo bhuíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. I thank the Minister for the detail she has provided today. Key to all of this is the InterTradelreland analysis that 137 collaborative applications have proven successful in securing funding of €40 million for 50 proposals, which is extremely welcome. A good part of that is down to information and advice sharing. Given that success, how could that good practice be shared with other Departments to draw down EU funding, engage in collaborative projects and get more advice and assistance out to other businesses in other fields?

**Mrs Foster:** The way in which the North/South procurement group has worked is a good example of how Departments can work together. As I understand it, SIB and the Assembly's central procurement division are working with the central procurement division in the Republic of Ireland's Government — forgive me if that is not the right title — to share practices within that group. The group has been up and running for over a year and worked quite well. It informs the Go-2-Tender programme and what people need to take account of. We will run more seminars around Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the coming months to see if there is more information that we can give to companies so that they can avail themselves of it. That is a good model that is working between the Finance Department, SIB and their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland.

**Mr Allister:** The Minister referred to an £18 billion public procurement market. Using whatever are the latest figures that she has, will she tell us what has been Northern Ireland companies' share of the Republic's procurement market and vice versa in respect of our procurement market and companies from the Republic, given that Northern Ireland exports to the Republic fell by 16% last year?

**Mrs Foster:** I thank the Member for his question. I do not have the precise figures in front of me. I will, of course, write to the Member with those figures. I believe that Northern Ireland companies are better off as a result of using the InterTradelreland Go-2-Tender programme than they would be if it were not there. It gives them information, advice and assistance in looking for tenders. Frankly, as small businesses, they would suffer if they did not have that advice and assistance. I am happy to write to the Member with the details.

**Mr S Anderson:** I thank the Minister for her statement. Did the Minister discuss the problem that many companies face in trying to get access to finance?

**Mrs Foster:** I thank the Member for his question. Access to finance took up a considerable amount of time at the Council meeting. We talked about what Invest NI is doing to assist small and medium-sized businesses in Northern Ireland in that regard. When InterTradelreland does its quarterly monitor, it asks questions about access to finance. That helps to inform us whether there have been fundamental changes between each quarter. I hope that it will continue to do that. It is important to reflect the difficulties in getting access to finance so that we, as Ministers, can try to intervene if we think that it is necessary. It will not surprise the House to hear that access to finance is a subject that I raised again at the North/South Ministerial Council.

## Executive Committee Business

### Pensions Bill: Consideration Stage

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I call the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, to move the Bill.

**Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):** Amendment Nos 1, 2, 3 and 4 — sorry.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I ask the Minister to formally move the Bill.

**Mr McCausland:** Apologies. Perhaps it would assist the House if I take a step back and reiterate what clause 1 does. Existing legislation provides for the equalisation of state pension age for men and women at 65.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Procedures, I understand, require that you move the Consideration Stage of the Bill right at the start and then give a further explanation if you wish.

*Moved.* — [Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development).]

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I advise Members that they have a Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order of consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in the provisional grouping of amendments selected list.

There are two groups of amendments, and we will debate the amendments in each group in turn. The first debate will be on amendment Nos 1 to 4 and amendment No 7, which deal with changes to the state pension age for men and women. The second debate will be on amendment Nos 5 and 6, which deal with winter fuel payments and a duty to report.

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 shall proceed.

#### **Clause 1 (Equalisation of and increase in pensionable age for men and women)**

**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, 3 and 4, which are consequential amendments, and amendment No 7. The amendments relate to the timetable for making changes to the state pension age.

**Mr Durkan:** I beg to move amendment No 1: In page 1, line 7, leave out “1953” and insert “1955”.

*The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:*

No 2: In page 1, line 9, leave out subsection (4). — [Mr Durkan.]

No 3: In page 2, leave out lines 5 to 14 and insert

|                                  |                    |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| “6th April 1955 to 5th May 1955  | 6th May 2020       |
| 6th May 1955 to 5th June 1955    | 6th July 2020      |
| 6th June 1955 to 5th July 1955   | 6th September 2020 |
| 6th July 1955 to 5th August 1955 | 6th November 2020  |

6th August 1955 to 5th September 1955

6th January 2021

6th September 1955 to 5th October 1955

6th March 2021

6th October 1955 to 5th November 1955

6th May 2021

6th November 1955 to 5th December 1955

6th July 2021

6th December 1955 to 5th January 1956

6th September 2021

6th January 1956 to 5th February 1956

6th November 2021

6th February 1956 to 5th March 1956

6th January 2022

6th March 1956 to 5th April 1956

6th March 2022” — [Mr Durkan.]

No 4: In page 2, line 15, leave out “1954” and insert “1956”. — [Mr Durkan.]

No 7: In schedule 1, page 23, line 21, leave out “2018” and insert “2020”. — [Mr Durkan.]

**Mr Durkan:** I welcome the opportunity not only to debate the Bill once again but to move amendments to it. I am pleased to avail myself of this opportunity, particularly because it had been the Minister’s intention to give the Bill accelerated passage. That reluctance to have such an important issue publicly debated and scrutinised now seems strange, given the Minister’s recent assertions that the Welfare Reform Bill must have full scrutiny and transparency.

We support the rationale behind the Bill. The equalisation of pension age is right and just. It is also common sense that the increase in life expectancy is reflected in an increase in pensionable age. However, we have issues with the current Bill and the impact that it will have on many people here.

The logic behind the Bill is clear and understandable: the qualifying age for pensions should be raised because life expectancy is increasing. People are living longer, and it is assumed that they will be willing and able to work longer. It is also assumed that there will be jobs for people to stay in for longer.

The Bill is being pushed as reformist and progressive legislation that is based on the developing and changing needs of society. Therefore, in our opinion, it is remarkable that it contains such blatant inequalities. The SDLP, as a party that has a core and fundamental principle of equality, sees merit in the equalisation of the pension age for men and women. However, forcing an expectant group of women of a certain age to change their life, plans and futures without considering the challenges that that will pose for them is a far cry from equality.

The time frame within which the pension expectations of those 7,000-odd women will be disrupted is purely a money-saving exercise by the Westminster Government. It is designed to get more money in from people while putting less out, and it is certainly not based on the needs of the individual. It is also particularly unfair to force women to face two accelerations when men will face only one.

The Bill will throw the retirement plans of many into disarray. Previously stated timescales had indicated that there would be no changes until 2020. Therefore, women who have left their job in the belief that they could rely on receiving their pension on their sixty-fifth birthday may not have enough savings or resources to live on for a year to 16 months. We have no guarantees that the goalposts will not move again and move often, and we have serious concerns about that as we go forward.

Although some changes were made in Westminster that mitigated some of the burden facing women, they do not go far enough, specifically for women who will be affected by the changes come 2018. The upper age limit for benefits has been extended to assist older people who cannot get work, but we must consider the wider impact that that has and the wider impression that it creates.

Many older people who have worked their entire life and saved into pension schemes simply do not want to go on benefits. They want what they are entitled to and what they have worked for. To force them to accept these changes, without sufficient time to make adequate provision, is unfair and illogical.

#### 11.00 am

Using the extended benefit qualification as an option flies in the face of what the Assembly is professing to do, which is to cut down on welfare dependency. It would be contradictory of the Assembly to accept such a move that would leave us going backwards — a move that offers benefits as a lifestyle choice rather than as a short-term lifesaver.

Keeping older people trapped in a job when they may wish to retire will also have serious ramifications. It will certainly exacerbate the ever-growing problem we have of youth unemployment. Furthermore, there are implications for sectors in which people are, reluctantly, working longer. They could well become disenchanted, and that may impact on the service or skill that they provide. Instead of stabilising the economy, those measures could create a stagnant and disenfranchised workforce who will feel aggrieved by a Government who have, once again, put the working-class person at the bottom of their mandate. It will also keep people in important jobs for which they are no longer physically fit.

It is accepted, although it should not be accepted by us, that we have a lower standard of living here in Northern Ireland. We have higher rates of poverty and higher rates of disability. The Bill would automatically impact on a person's eligibility for the winter fuel payment and, therefore, increase our struggle in the battle against fuel poverty. People are being told to save for their retirement to supplement their pension, but the sad reality is that so many people here live on the breadline that saving is beyond them.

Although there can be no argument that people are living longer, we need to ensure that they have a quality of life to match their quantity of years. Last week's Budget in Westminster signalled yet again the Tories' apparently insatiable appetite for attacking the most vulnerable.

The proposed move to index pension increases by the consumer price index (CPI) rather than the retail price index will ultimately devalue public sector pensions by up to 15%.

That change will, undoubtedly, hit public sector workers hard, as it will the poorest in society, by making them permanently disadvantaged. Passing this clause in the Bill today will enshrine in law the use of CPI as the minimum legal requirement for pension increase, which means that, even when the deficit is gone, our hard-working public sector workers and the poorest in society will be hit year after year, even when earnings growth has returned.

The Assembly needs to consider its options. We need to recognise the severe detrimental impact the changes will have on individuals in society. One possibility that had been raised in Westminster prior to the Bill receiving Royal Assent was to negotiate a way of using CPI as a temporary measure, for example, for three years, in order to help stabilise the economy. That would represent a fair contribution from benefits and recipients at a time when wage growth is suppressed. Such an alternative would work to reduce the deficit while not unfairly impacting on individuals' incomes over the longer term.

In my view, that is an option that needs much exploration and deserves our attention and consideration. I am hopeful that we can look at this more closely at the next stage of the Bill and thrash out a solution to this complex clause in order to mitigate the harsh reality it imposes, as drafted.

I move my amendments to make the Bill, in our opinion, fairer and more balanced. Acceptance of our amendments would display that the Assembly has a real understanding of, and sympathy for, the hardship being faced by so many of our citizens. We have here an opportunity to mitigate that, even slightly.

We believe that a compromise can be reached between the aims of the coalition Government and the needs of our people. As previously stated, we concur with the thinking behind the Bill, but our difficulty is with the timetable for its implementation. This Bill accelerates too fast the equalisation and increase of pension ages. It is irrational and unfair for a Government to move the goalposts for individuals who have worked hard and planned for their retirement, leaving them to reorganise and, in many cases, struggle.

I bring these amendments before the Assembly in the belief that we must investigate the options that best serve our constituents. My amended timetable represents a compromise between the existing statute and the proposed acceleration. The current legislation allows for equalisation by 2020 and an increase in state pension age between 2024 and 2026. The proposed legislation accelerates that, envisaging equalisation by 2018 and an increase in the state pension age by 2020. Our amendments still allow for equalisation and an increase in qualifying age by 2020. However, we believe that our proposal to start the reform in 2020 acknowledges Turner's recommendation that adequate time must be given for the affected individuals to prepare for the extra time that they will be without their expected pensions. Our amendments will mean that the Bill can still generate savings and bring equality, but will do so more fairly.

**Mr A Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development):** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Although I am speaking as the Chair of the Social Development Committee, the Committee has not been able to adopt a position on these amendments. I

very much appreciate the short period of latitude that the Deputy Speaker has given me to outline the backdrop to the amendments in the context of the Committee's deliberations.

The Committee considered the Bill at Committee Stage and produced a report, which was published and printed on 8 March. It is fair to say that clause 1, to which the current amendments apply, was the clause that gave the Committee most concern. All members of the Committee had concerns of various natures around clause 1. Clause 1 relates specifically to the equalisation of the pensionable age for women and men and the increase in eligibility to 66 years of age for men and women. Although the Committee did consider this, and took quite a number of presentations and submissions from various stakeholders, it did not go into the business of trying to amend the Bill.

Even though the Committee voted not to support clause 1, members felt that, rather than prolong the Committee Stage of the Bill, we would leave it to the parties and other Members to bring amendments at the appropriate stage; for example, today. Although concerns were expressed by a range of members — indeed, the Committee rejected clause 1 by way of a vote — nevertheless, we did not consider any of the amendments. Therefore, I will not be addressing the amendments on behalf of the Committee. Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle, for allowing me a degree of latitude.

My party will support the amendments moved by Mark Durkan. We very much appreciate that those amendments are, in a way, difficult. We fully understand the arguments around parity. This is, as we have been told, an issue of parity. By the same token, even in the context of the British Government dealing with some of these issues, it was drawn to the Committee's attention that a very clear anomaly would impact on quite a number of women. Those women would be impacted on in quite a negative way by the extension of the age criteria. The British Government did bring forward some transitional arrangements that reduced the number of women that that would impact on, but we understand that it will still have an impact on around 7,000 women. We teased this out with the Department and were eventually told that if, for example, the Executive or the Minister were of a mind to address that anomaly, it would cost somewhere in the region of £57 million.

At least that would have allowed the Minister, the Department and the Executive to consider whether they would be prepared to adopt such an amendment or transitional arrangement on the basis of cost, because they would, at least, have a price tag to consider. However, we were given further information that it would not, in fact, be just £57 million, because there would be other important consequential arrangements: for example, as we do not have an IT system that is fit for purpose, we would have to spend money on that. We were then told that people living elsewhere might want to come here. Someone actually said that people might want to come from Wales to live here because women of a particular age would get a better deal on their pension. When we continued to further tease this out, we were told that the bottom line was that it was an issue of parity that we could not change anyway. My view and that of my party is that we do not believe that the whole question of parity has been properly and thoroughly teased out and exhausted.

We are not oblivious to the issue of parity, and we are certainly not oblivious to the likely attendant costs if the Assembly and Executive were to take a different view from that directed by the British Government. However, by the same token, we believe that when British Ministers talk about flexibility in the system, and so on, we need to examine what that means. My experience as a member of the Committee for Social Development for almost a year is that I have seen little evidence of that flexibility. I am somewhat disappointed by that, because we keep coming back to the argument that, no matter how many arguments you bring forward, it is an issue of parity and you cannot get round that.

The Committee received a number of presentations during its consideration of the Bill. One was from Age NI, which acknowledged that people were living longer, thankfully, but that did not necessarily mean that they were healthier. In fact, Age NI presented figures to show that the life expectancy of people living here in the North was different from those living in Britain. People's life expectancy here in the North is lower than that of those living elsewhere. Obviously, we will deal with that in more detail later in the debate.

Representatives of NIPSA made it clear to the Committee that it supported the principle of parity, "warts and all", and they elaborated on the reasons for that. I do not second-guess the reasons put forward; I merely make the point that there are those, including us, who are fully aware of the issue of parity. The reason why we are prepared to support Mark Durkan's amendments is because we want to fully consider and exhaust all opportunities to right what we believe to be a wrong. NIPSA introduced an interesting argument, which was that it agreed with the principle of equalisation, but asked why it had to be on the basis of women who could retire aged 60 having to wait until the age of 65 to become equal to men: why could the equalisation not be done in reverse? In other words, why should men not be able to retire at the age of 60 — the same age as women — instead of 65? That would fit into the development profile of some of the points that Mark Durkan made about the fact that people who are unemployed could take up jobs vacated by people who were able to retire earlier.

I do not want to elaborate any further on the comments made by Mark Durkan. Suffice it to say that we believe that further transitional arrangements could be introduced into the Bill. On that basis, although we are not entirely happy with the amendments put forward by Mark Durkan, we think that they seek to improve on that being imposed by the British Government. I say "imposed" with clarity on its meaning. The Bill deals with equalising the age of retirement between women and men up to the age of 65 and then upward to the age of 66. Mark Durkan already made the point, and I made the same point during a previous debate in the Chamber, which is that I have no doubt that, in the time ahead, the British Government will continue to extend upward the age of retirement. On that basis, therefore, Sinn Féin is prepared to support Mark Durkan's amendments.

#### 11.15 am

**Ms P Bradley:** No one in the Assembly wants to increase the retirement age for anyone. However, when we were elected to serve our country, we did so knowing that we would at times have to take decisions that we would rather not take. I oppose amendment Nos 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 on the grounds



that all they would do would be to increase the economic cost to the taxpayer while still achieving the same result.

Our country has an ageing demographic, as we have heard again and again in the plethora of debates in the Chamber. Projections by the Office for National Statistics in 2008 indicate that the number of people reaching the age of 66 in 2026 is expected to live for a year and a half longer than originally projected. That is to be welcomed, but it also comes with an added financial cost to the taxpayers of Northern Ireland.

An underpinning policy has been placed on us by Westminster to rebalance the financial burden between those of working age and those of pensionable age. The simple and overriding fact is that Northern Ireland has a commitment to ensure parity with the rest of the UK. That has to be adhered to for two main reasons, the first being economics. Simply put, if we do not equalise state pension age by November 2018, we would have to find the extra economic resources, as not to equalise it would result in significantly increased expenditure on pension or benefits that we would have to find as a devolved region.

Secondly, we would have to look carefully into the area of breaking parity and what that would mean for Northern Ireland. We would have to be sure that we can legally impose territorial limitations on any entitlement to ensure that we are not inundated by people from other regions.

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

**Ms P Bradley:** Go ahead.

**Mr Easton:** Does the Member agree that equalising pension age is a European directive, and that if we fail to do it, we would break European laws and be fined?

**Ms P Bradley:** Yes, I totally agree.

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

**Ms P Bradley:** No, I want to continue. Breaking parity would take economic resources away from our population and may mean that other programmes would suffer.

Finally, the Pensions Bill already has provisions to ensure that the minimum number of people would experience delay when they are entitled to a state pension and that the delay would be kept to a minimum. The transition is accelerated from the draft Bill so that instead of increasing in one-month increments, state pension age increases in increments of three months, which means that the longest delay would be 18 months as opposed to two years. Under the original proposals, approximately 800 women would have experienced a delay of two years, but under the revised proposals, no woman will face a delay of over 18 months. That is to be welcomed.

I cannot in good faith support the amendments. To do so would be to increase the economic burden on our already stretched taxpayers and ultimately delay the inevitable. No matter what we do, the fact remains that the age at which some people will receive state pension will be delayed. As elected Members, it is our duty to ensure that it is done while causing as little pain as possible to the entire community of Northern Ireland.

**Mr Copeland:** I welcome the opportunity to contribute to today's debate. I pay particular tribute to the manner in which the Committee for Social Development conducted the Committee Stage. Everyone was given his or her place, and everyone's opinion was taken into account.

Mr Durkan proposes one primary amendment, and everything that flows from that is consequential. All that is predicated on legislation brought by the coalition Government, but that is also predicated on the actions of a previous coalition Government who, in 1942, in the midst of the greatest conflagration and slaughter that mankind has ever endured, decided that things would have to change.

They had a very simple idea. Everything that we talk about in the Chamber today is predicated on that idea. It was the notion that everyone of working age would be expected to pay a weekly national insurance contribution. In return, benefits would flow from that contribution to the sick, the widowed, the retired and the unemployed, and an element would go to families. Today, we are discussing something that began over 60 years ago.

The truth is that the world has changed to a degree. In those days, the proportion of people in paid work to those who were not in paid work was much greater. Social divisions were as, if not more, pronounced. It was a method by which society could do what could be adjudicated as being right. However, the basis of that notion was that people would work in industry, which was generally heavy industry — in engineering and in steelworks. It was hard graft. Wives would not benefit from washing machines or other modern conveniences of life. Everyone would live until around their mid-60s, with a substantial proportion of people expiring before they were 70 or 80.

Today, longevity has increased greatly. On Sunday, I had the privilege to be around the lower parts of my constituency where I encountered three young children who were all less than seven months old. Yesterday, I learned from a television report that one in three people — in other words, one of those children — will live to be 100 years old. Therefore, it is important that we do something that recognises that fact.

Every fibre of my person wants to support Mark H Durkan's amendment. The fact that it has to be paid for is the difficulty. To the Minister, I repeat my usual mantra: can it be done and, if so, at what cost? Will it breach parity? If so, what will be the cost? Will the Minister take whatever steps he can to ameliorate its outworkings? To a degree, they have already been ameliorated by alterations at Westminster. My position and that of my party will depend on the arguments that are made by the Minister on the notions of parity and cost.

**Mr Dickson:** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, given the huge impact that it will have on our constituents. I am sure that fellow Members will, like me, have received a volume of concerns from constituents who are understandably worried about the changes, which will alter the entire pension system over the next number of years. As other Members said, we have an ageing population, and one that is living longer. Therefore, we need to ensure that the pension system is structured in such a way that gives promised incomes that can be delivered in the future and that we can avert any crisis that might arise from not making adequate preparations. I share many of the

concerns raised about what the most appropriate and fair way is to deal with it.

Although we welcome the equalisation of the state pension age for men and women, key problems are associated with the Government's proposals; namely, the great speed at which the proposals are now to be brought in. Women's state pension age was due to reach 65 by 2020. That timetable had been in place for years. Women who would be affected by it were adjusting accordingly. However, in June 2010, the new coalition Government announced a review of the timetable for increasing the state pension age to 66 by 2020, rather than by 2026, thereby accelerating the process so that women's pension age reaches 65 by November 2018.

My colleague Naomi Long MP was one of many who raised that issue with the Government on behalf of constituents during the passage of the Pensions Bill at Westminster. The Government responded to those calls by amending a clause, which now means that nobody has to wait more than 18 months. That amendment ameliorates the increase in the state pension age for around 245,000 women and 240,000 men, at a cost of £1.1 billion.

That was a positive step forward, and we should welcome it. Although the Alliance Party is sympathetic to those who now find themselves with less time to prepare financially, we believe that the place to fight the Bill's aspects was at Westminster. All parties in the Chamber had the opportunity to do that, and I am glad that my colleague did so. Unfortunately, the Government were only ever going to shift so far. As others said, we need to be realistic, not play populist politics with the issue. We must accept that Northern Ireland simply cannot afford to break parity on the issue.

**Mr Easton:** I oppose amendment Nos 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 in group 1, which relates to the equalisation of the state pension age between men and women and the timeline for increasing the state pension age from 65 to 66. Although I and others have concerns about the Pensions Bill, I am even more concerned about the amendments, because money would have to be taken out of other Departments to pay for the proposals. The amendments seem to be ill thought out, with a year changed here and a year or two changed there, there are no costings, and they appear amateurish in nature, maybe reflecting the inexperience of the proposer.

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

**Mr Easton:** No.

Under the amendments, we would see the equalisation of the state pension age between men and women in 2020 rather than 2018. The retirement age for men stands at 65, and the Bill aims to increase the age for men and women to 66 by 2020. Under the proposed amendments, there would be a two-year difference between what happens in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, and the Department for Social Development would have to fund that difference — if the money could, indeed, be found — which would have major repercussions on the amount of money we have. Which Departments' budgets would that come out of? Would it mean that we have to close hospitals and schools? Would we see job losses as a result of having to pay for the changes proposed under the amendments? If so, that would have an impact on the Northern Ireland economy.

I urge Members to understand the serious consequences of voting for the amendments and, therefore, oppose them.

**Mr Douglas:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak this morning. I oppose amendment Nos 1, 2, 3 and 4. Those of us on the Social Development Committee all have concerns. Like all Members of the Assembly, we have senior citizens coming into our offices and, therefore, we know that the elderly have a lot of concerns. One of my concerns is the speed at which the reforms are going through Westminster under the Tory-Lib Dem coalition. We need to take that into account. For me, this morning is about backing the Minister and the Bill, in respect of the equalisation of the state pension age between men and women.

Last week, I was at a welfare reform seminar in east Belfast. Many people there had concerns, as have many Members in the Assembly, including me. Les Allamby from the Law Centre was there. He recognises that breaking parity would mean taking money from other Departments. Breaking parity would also have an impact on the amount we get for pensions, which is something like £1.9 billion. So, there is a whole question over that. Bumper Graham from the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA), which I think was mentioned, was also there. He said that he did not want to break parity and he recognises that we cannot do so. He does not like parity, warts and all, but feels, on behalf of NIPSA and its members, that breaking parity would mean that additional money would be taken from the block grant.

When the Minister is responding later, I would like him to give us a rough idea of how much it would cost to implement the changes proposed in the amendments. How much would it cost Northern Ireland if we were to drain money from other areas, as my colleague said? I urge Members to seriously consider the implications —

**11.30 am**

**Mr Copeland:** Thank you for giving way. Think not only how much it would cost, but where the money would come from, which is equally important, because knowing the price of something is one thing but knowing what you may have to give up is equally important.

**Mr Douglas:** Yes, that is a good point that has been made at our Committee and that we all recognise.

**Mr F McCann:** On what Mr Copeland said: we have spent years going through the debate on parity. I know that people are genuinely concerned about what breaking parity may cost. The Member spoke about people living to 100. I think that that is great, but there are parts of this city where people die earlier than expected. Therein lies the inequality: there will be people who die without ever enjoying any return for what they paid into the pension system. That is what we are talking about. There are also inequalities, and that is where we are coming from.

**Mr Douglas:** The Member makes a good point, but I go back to mine, which is that if we do not go with the Bill, if we go with these amendments, it will cost us money somewhere along the line. People will suffer because of cuts in other Departments. I reiterate my request for the Minister to respond to that later. I urge Members to seriously consider the impact of these decisions. Delay is inevitable for us all, so I oppose amendment Nos 1, 2, 3 and 4.

**Ms Brown:** I also oppose the group 1 amendments, which relate to the equalisation of the state pension age between men and women, as well as the timeline for increasing the state pension retirement age from 65 to 66 overall.

As the Bill stands, it ensures that Northern Ireland is brought into line with the rest of the United Kingdom and there is no difference between the retirement age here and anywhere else in the UK. As a unionist, I favour parity with the rest of our nation. I am also concerned that, should these amendments pass, we will see money being taken out of other aspects of the social security system to meet the demands placed on the Department for Social Development by this House. Under these amendments, we will see the equalisation of the retirement age of men and women in 2020 rather than 2018, in line with national policy.

The current retirement age for men is 65, and the Bill aims to increase that to 66 by 2020 for men and women. The amendments would lead to a delay of two years between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, with the new retirement age of 66 being reached by 2020 in GB, but not until 2022 in Northern Ireland. Similarly, the equalisation of the retirement age between men and women will happen in 2020 under these amendments, rather than in 2018, as will be the case elsewhere in the UK.

Given that these amendments embrace national policy, albeit two years later, I do not understand their thrust or purpose, other than to delay the inevitable. They would leave the Department for Social Development to fund the two-year difference. That would have major repercussions on other vital aspects of the Department, which is responsible for administering and running a social security system that is fit for all purposes and assists those in need by securing a safety net for individuals and families.

The reality is that the two-year delay proposed by the amendments could lead to a funding gap for a total of four years, as equalisation in the retirement age of men and women will occur by 2020 rather than 2018. That would mean the Department having to pay out proportionately more money than GB for women's pensions in that period. A further funding difference will be created by the increase to 66 in the overall state retirement age between 2020 and 2022, as opposed to that occurring two years earlier in the rest of the UK.

I urge Members to acknowledge and understand the repercussions of what they will do by voting for the amendments in this group. They may think that they are doing some a favour by letting some people receive their pension earlier than anywhere else in the UK. The reality is that they are not. In fact, they could harm those dependent on other vital aspects of the social security system.

**Mr McCausland:** Amendment Nos 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 are concerned with changes to the state pension age. Perhaps it would assist the House if I were to take a step back and reiterate precisely what clause 1 does. Existing legislation provides for the equalisation of the state pension age for men and women at 65 between April 2010 and April 2020, and to increase it to 66 between April 2024 and April 2026. The Bill proposes to phase in the increase in the pension age to 66 between December 2018 and October 2020. That change has been made in response to increases in life

expectancy and is intended to ensure that the state pension remains sustainable for future generations.

The pace of equalising pension ages for men and women at 65 will accelerate from 2016, so that women will have the same state pension age as men by November 2018 instead of April 2020. That is necessary because any option that would widen the gap between the state pension age for men and women would run contrary to directive 79/7/EEC, and the increase in the state pension age to 66 must, therefore, be applied to men and women at the same time. These measures correspond to measures in the Pensions Act 2011 and will result in an estimated reduction in expenditure on pensioner benefits in Northern Ireland of £810 million between 2016 and 2026.

I listened carefully to the arguments put forward in support of the amendments. I appreciate that the amendments are intended to ensure that the equalisation of the pension age reverts to the existing timetable and that the increase of the pension age to 66 should start from May 2020 and be completed by April 2022. That would mean a clear breach of parity, and as several Members queried the extent of the cost to the Northern Ireland block grant of such a breach, I can confirm that it is estimated at £270 million. I know that some Members believe that we can have a kind of "pick and mix" approach to parity and that we can gobble up the goodies that we like and spit out the things that we do not. They seem to expect the Westminster Government or, perhaps more correctly, taxpayers across the UK to pick up the tab. Can we really say to people in Britain that we will happily take the £3 billion that they give us every year to keep our social security system running but that they should not expect us to work as long as them before we can access our pensions? There is an issue of equality and parity across the United Kingdom.

Let us look at the cold facts. According to the Office for National Statistics, in the period 2008 to 2010, the average life expectancy for a man aged 65 in Northern Ireland was 17.4 years. That compared with 17.7 years in Wales, 18.2 years in England and 16.8 years in Scotland. Therefore, life expectancy for men here was broadly similar to that in Wales, marginally less than that in England and higher than that in Scotland. The same is true for women, for whom life expectancy at 65 here in the same period was 20.2 years, which compared with 20.3 years in Wales, 20.8 years in England but only 19.3 years in Scotland. Some Members will argue that there is not necessarily a correlation between living longer and having good health to enjoy old age, and I think that we all accept that. However, it is true that, in general, people are staying fitter for longer, and it is certainly true that parts of Great Britain have worse health problems than we do. Can we really argue that it is right to expect taxpayers in Britain with lower life expectancies to continue to fund our benefit system, while they have to work longer than people here before they can get their pensions?

We must remember that the funding arrangements for social security are unique. They operate outside of the Barnett formula and are based on actual need. Therefore, in effect, our benefit costs are fully funded. However, that funding stream is predicated specifically on the maintenance of parity. Any additional costs arising from a breach of parity would have to be picked up by the Northern Ireland block grant. The statement of funding principles provides for funding to be reviewed if parity is breached.

Only last week, the Chancellor announced his plans to look at the disparity between local rates of pay in the private and public sectors; in short, regionalisation of pay. It is not a seismic leap to fear that a review of funding for social security could trigger consideration of regional rates of benefit. Those Members who say that we should test the boundaries of parity —

**Mr McDevitt:** I appreciate the Minister's giving way. I have been listening very carefully to what he has been saying, and I note that he has mounted an argument that is built around parity. However, that is the opposite argument to the one that his Westminster colleagues mounted when they supported these amendments when they were tabled in Westminster. We have a situation where the Finance Minister in this House, who also happens to be an MP, voted for these very amendments — the same amendments, when they were before the House of Commons — and made the point that people were entitled to the sort of provisions that are outlined in the amendments. The Minister for Social Development has come into this House to argue the contrary. If devolution is to mean something, it should mean that the rights of people who are elected to represent constituents at a regional level should be upheld. The Minister is being a bit disingenuous in arguing for parity when his own MPs supported the amendments that we have tabled in this House.

**Mr McCausland:** The Member has failed to grasp the point that I just made because he does not want to understand it. Let us recall it for his benefit so that he understands. The Chancellor was announcing his plans to look at the disparity between local rates of pay in the private and public sectors; in short, regionalisation of pay. I repeat, for the Member's benefit, that it is not a seismic leap to fear that a review of funding for social security could trigger consideration of regional rates of benefit. So, those Members who say that we should test the boundaries of parity, or push the envelope that bit further, are playing a potentially dangerous game.

I have highlighted already the additional cost of £270 million that we would face and the dangers of breaking down the issue of parity. The amendments raise a number of other questions.

**Mr Copeland:** Thank you, sir. Can you explain whether this money would have to be found from your budget or from the Executive Budget, and can you give some indication of the scale of the difficulties that would be faced by having to replace the £270 million to which you referred?

**Mr McCausland:** I thank the Member for his intervention. It is a point that he and others made earlier on, and I was going to return to it in due course. However, I am happy to respond at this point. The £270 million commitment would not be a DSD commitment; it would be an Executive commitment. The question, therefore, would be for the Executive to decide whether we take that £270 million out of the education budget or the health budget, but, of course, Mr McDevitt is so busy talking to others that he does not bother listening for that important point. That is the sort of important issue that he does not want to face up to and acknowledge.

**Mr McDevitt:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr McCausland:** I only give way if I am going to hear something constructive, and I have heard nothing.

There are other issues that need to be considered, and the amendments raise a number of those. The first concerns the ability of the DWP computer system to operate different schemes for Northern Ireland and Great Britain. It should be remembered that the upper age limits for working-age benefits are also affected. This would have to be impacted and costed, and any costs would fall to Northern Ireland. The figure of £270 million would then be topped up further by additional costs.

Secondly, whether, in light of the reciprocal arrangements with Great Britain and the fact that there are no residence requirements for entitlement to a state pension, we could legally prevent people who live in any other part of the United Kingdom — any part of Great Britain — from claiming the Northern Ireland pension rather than waiting longer to qualify for the Great Britain pension. Thirdly, in relation to the pension entitlement of European Economic Area workers, here and in Great Britain, will it be necessary or even possible to calculate Northern Ireland pension entitlement on a pro rata basis?

#### 11.45 am

Those are major issues, with the potential for significant additional costs, and those costs would have to be met out of the budgets of other Departments. Working purely on the additional benefits costs at around £270 million, where is that money to come from? Are we to take the money away from the health service, the education service, or where? In an ideal world, no one would want to increase state pension ages. It does not give me any pleasure to have to resist the amendments, but we cannot bury our heads in the sand. We have to accept the financial realities with which we are faced, and I believe that there is a general acceptance that changes to state pension ages are inevitable.

To summarise, the proposals in the Bill have been made in response to the increase in life expectancy and are intended to ensure that the state pension remains sustainable for future generations. They correspond to measures in the Pensions Act 2011 and will result in an estimated reduction in expenditure on pensioner benefits in Northern Ireland of £810 million by 2026. The amendments, if accepted, are a clear breach of parity and will result in a cost to the Northern Ireland block of some £270 million. That will raise major questions about how and to whom a Northern Ireland pension would be payable.

I will now pick up on points that a number of Members made. First, I noticed Mark Durkan's concerns about the speed of introduction of the changes. In an ideal world, none of us would want to change the existing timetables, but we must accept that people are living longer and that the Westminster Government have decided that the original timetable is unsustainable. That is the reality, however much we may not like it. He was also prone to comment about accelerated passage. In fact, I sought the Committee's views on accelerated passage because I wanted to give women as much time as possible to prepare for the changes. Some members of the Committee argued the importance of the scrutiny role of the Committee, and the Committee's response to me made clear that it believed that the arguments for and against accelerated passage were finely balanced, so I am surprised at the Member's jibe about accelerated passage.

Mr Maskey raised the issue of equalising the pension age at 60. I am sure that many folk would find that very appealing and attractive. Mr Maskey thinks that that needs to be considered. It was put to him, I think, by some trade union representatives.

**Mr A Maskey:** I merely used that as an example in the spirit of generosity. I was making the point that we understood the whole principle of parity, and I was referring to other people also understanding it. I was not necessarily advocating anything. I was repeating what was given to the Committee.

**Mr McCausland:** I take the Member's point. If I recollect exactly, it was put to him by a lobby group for a trade union, rather than it being a personal viewpoint. Whoever advocates it needs to get a dose of reality. We are facing an ageing population, here in Northern Ireland and, indeed, throughout the United Kingdom. That is a reality. The number of people of working age compared with people of pensionable age, which is called the support ratio, is falling. My understanding is that the ratio is currently 3:1 and will be 2:1 by 2020. In Northern Ireland, the number of people who are aged 65 or over is expected to increase by 25% between 2010 and 2015. Between 2010 and 2025, it is expected to rise by 42%. We cannot bury our heads in the sand about the fact that the number of people of pensionable age is increasing substantially. It is as simple as that.

Michael Copeland raised the issue of the national insurance system and reminded us of its origins. I understand his point about the system and how people have paid in all their lives. Unfortunately — this is, in a sense, a legacy of the original Beveridge scheme — full pensions started to be paid shortly after the system was set up. So, individuals do not have their own separate pension pot building up in the national insurance fund. The reality of the system is that today's contributions pay for today's benefits.

I will finish off by addressing a couple of points that Members raised, one of which was concern about the implications of bringing forward the proposals. I have certainly expressed our concerns to Ministers in London very strongly and clearly. I share many of the concerns about the effects of the proposed changes, and I have made clear to Ministers in London my view that planning for retirement is a long-term process. There is no doubt about that. Changes introduced at short notice do little to inspire confidence in the pension system or to encourage individuals to make long-term plans. Indeed, in June 2011, I urged Iain Duncan Smith to alleviate the impact of the pension-age changes on women. On 18 October 2011, the House of Commons accepted an amendment to the Westminster Bill to alter the timetable for increase to 66 by October 2020 rather than by April 2020, and the amended proposal provides a maximum increase in pension age of 18 months rather than the two years under the original proposal. That concession eased the impact on the women most significantly affected by the original proposals. However, I emphasise that we have expressed concerns directly to the Government at Westminster and to Iain Duncan Smith.

Alex Maskey asked what the next move might be and whether there will be further changes at Westminster. On 29 November 2011, George Osborne made a speech in which he said very clearly that the intention was, in due course, to increase the age from 66 to 67. The direction of movement

by the Conservative/Lib Dem coalition Government at Westminster is, therefore, very clear.

Fra McCann said that not everyone lives to 100. He is right. Some folk do, and some folk live well into their 90s. However, although many people do not reach that age, the fact is that, as I have indicated, the average age is increasing. That is the really significant figure.

I welcome Stewart Dickson's comments. He picked up on the point of an ageing population and said that we should not play populist politics with this. I welcome his comment.

The amendments would have a significant impact, and I have set that out very clearly. They would lead to a breach of parity, a cost of £270 million that would have to be met out of other Departments and major questions about how and to whom a Northern Ireland pension would be payable. For those very strong and substantial reasons, along with the other points that I have made, I urge Members to oppose the amendments.

**Mr Durkan:** I thank all Members who have taken part in this morning's debate thus far. I will go through the contributions and touch on some points that have been raised.

First, we had the Chair of the Social Development Committee, Mr Alex Maskey, who referred to the Committee's consideration of, and opposition to, clause 1. I would like to take this opportunity to commend Mr Maskey on his chairmanship of the Committee during a very long and complex process. I concur with his assertion that we have not had the exhaustive debate on parity that is required and that will certainly be required as we await the Welfare Reform Bill. We also need to push the boundaries and see what flexibilities we may be afforded. I appreciate his party's support for our amendments, and also welcome the amendments that it has tabled. I will speak about them later.

Paula Bradley spoke largely about the increase in the financial cost to the taxpayer of increasing the pensionable age. I would have thought that given Ms Bradley's professional background, she would be acutely aware that sometimes societal costs should outweigh financial ones. Mr Easton's intervention displayed either a complete lack of attention or a lack of understanding. We are not opposing equalisation, so the talk of the EU directive is a complete red herring. We are not opposing equalisation: let me re-emphasise that for anyone who did not catch it.

The economic burden has to be looked at in the context of the savings that the legislation will realise for the Government as it is. I think the acceleration will realise something like £10 billion over 10 years for the Westminster Government, so the £270 million that we are talking about here today is peanuts, really.

Mr Copeland gave us a timely reminder of the origin of our pension scheme and accurately pointed out subsequent changes in our societal fabric. The fact that we have fewer people in paid employment is a sad reality. I wish that the Government would approach creating employment with the same zeal with which they are attacking the most vulnerable in our society. Mr Copeland also asked about costs. We really do need to look at the costs before passing this punitive legislation.

I welcome Stewart Dickson's remarks and his reiteration of our concerns.

**Mr Copeland:** Sorry for rising yet again. We already have an indication from the Minister that it will cost £270 million. Can you suggest where that might come from?

**Mr Durkan:** I will get around to that now. *[Laughter.]* I think it is unhelpful to be asking where it might come from, and saying things like, "It will have to come from the health budget." However, that might give Edwin Poots someone else to blame for the closure of hospitals, as if he needed someone else.

**Mr Humphrey:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does the Member agree that these are issues of extreme importance? The Minister has set out what is, factually, the financial position. To be fair, you gave way to the Member and he asked you a question. You spoke earlier about flexibility. What exactly do you mean about flexibility, and where will the money come from?

**Mr Durkan:** There is an Executive subgroup set up, we are told, to look at the impact of welfare reform. I would like to see it take something like this —

**Mr Humphrey:** Answer the question.

**Mr Durkan:** There are lots of areas that the Westminster Government, as well as this Government, could look at where more money could be found. Last year or the year before, our party presented a paper with 57 options for raising revenue. I do not agree with all of them — *[Interruption.]* That was tabled, and it has not been looked at —

**Mr Bell:** You were selling an airport you did not own.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Could all comments please come through the Chair?

**Mr Durkan:** It is OK to throw back the recommendations in it that would not work or were erroneous, but there were plenty of other recommendations in it that were not. They are silent on them and inactive on them.

I welcome Stewart Dickson's reiteration of our concerns. He pointed out that his colleague Naomi Long had supported these amendments in Westminster, but I must contest his assertion that that is where the fight takes place and here we just roll over. We have to be consistent. The Alliance Party has to be consistent, too, and so does the DUP.

## 12.00 pm

Mr Easton then spoke again. His assessment of the amendments is that they are amateurish and ill conceived. He is certainly at odds with his party's MPs, who voted for the same amendments. Does that make them amateurish as well? Sammy Douglas spoke about the cost, and he said that he was concerned about how such a move might be financed. They are genuine concerns, and it is something that we have to explore fully. We all have to explore that fully together. Pam Brown also spoke about the repercussions. We need a debate on what the repercussions might be. Will it mean that we have to take money out of health or education? We need to have that debate rather than just scaremongering.

I was glad that the Minister listened carefully to our arguments. He spoke about the cost of £270 million to the Northern Ireland block. Does that figure take into account an increase in the working-age benefits that will be paid? That qualifying age will have increased as well. I understand that that comes from a different source, but we are talking about parity and flexibility. They have to be looked at. We should ask what the additional cost is to the Treasury of increasing the qualifying age for work-related benefits.

**Mr Copeland:** At the establishment of the welfare state, the total cost to the Exchequer, above and beyond what was already being paid for the whole of the United Kingdom, was £80-odd million.

**Mr Durkan:** Thank you for that point of information.

We have a lower life expectancy here, so surely pensions will not ultimately cost as much as they do in other, more affluent areas.

A discussion ensued between my colleague Mr McDevitt and the Minister about parity. The Minister's Westminster colleagues seem to care more about corporation tax, on which they continue to fight for disparity. Is that a dangerous game?

**Mr Humphrey:** I am grateful to the Member for giving way. It is important that the Member gives some clarity to his and his party's position. The Minister has set out the cost to the Northern Ireland Executive of £270 million. The other benefits that he is talking about are paid for by Her Majesty's Treasury in London; they do not come out of the Northern Ireland Executive accounts. Maybe you will clarify the position. Where will the money come from to pay for this? Which Departments? Will it be the Health Department, the Education Department or DEL? Where will the money come from to pay for the amendments that you are talking about?

**Mr Durkan:** I have already addressed both those points. I recognised that the other benefits come from the Treasury, and I referred to my party's economic document as one area for exploration of where the funding could come from.

The scaremongering around the impact of a breach of parity on other services here is disingenuous, and I have already referred to the health aspect. The Minister spoke about my reference to accelerated passage. He made it very clear that it was his intention to give the Bill accelerated passage during an unannounced visit to the Committee. I wonder whether the Minister has considered whether the increase in pensionable age will have a knock-on impact on eligibility for or entitlement to other benefits, such as free public transport. Maybe he is still of a mind to do away with that altogether.

We could have just come along today to vote against the Bill, but we have come with compromise and with proposals that we believe could be workable. We have said that we will not dance merrily to the Tory tune as some in the House happily do, even though their colleagues and members of other parties support these exact recommendations in Westminster. The Labour Party proposed the same time frame for the Pensions Bill, but, unfortunately, the amendment was not passed. However, it had the support of DUP and Alliance Party representatives over there. The Assembly must ask itself why it is OK for the DUP to vote one way in Westminster on measures that affect Northern Ireland, but, when it actually has the power to change them here, it shies away from doing so.

**Mr Wells:** The Member has mentioned that several times. Had that vote been successful, that would have become Westminster policy and we would not be breaking parity, because we would be following the same policy for the four countries of the United Kingdom.

If we in this Chamber took the head stagers and voted for the amendment and found the £270 million, what would the Member do when the next breach of parity came along in the form of an amendment? How would he hold the line? People would say, "If you are prepared to find the £270 million for this, you can find it for many other issues". Once you break parity, you go down a very serious road, and I advise him not to do that.

**Mr Durkan:** The Secretary of State has assured us that there are flexibilities that we might be afforded. That is what the Minister has been telling us over the past couple of weeks.

We accept the constraints of parity, but we will not accept from the Executive a lack of creative thinking on and investigation of alternatives for this region. With these amendments, the Pensions Bill would illustrate that, although Northern Ireland accepts its position and cannot deviate from parity lightly, we are testing the flexibilities that Owen Paterson —

**Lord Morrow:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Durkan:** I have done enough. Come on.

Earlier this month, Owen Paterson clarified that those flexibilities exist. To make parity work as far as we can without bargaining our citizens' welfare, the SDLP seeks to open negotiations on a way forward. Our remit is making government work, not conceding to every Tory-imposed deal simply because we fear challenging it.

*Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 27; Noes 49.*

## AYES

*Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Dallat.*

## NOES

*Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Miss M McLveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Easton and Mr G Robinson.*

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Amendment Nos 2, 3 and 4 are consequential to amendment No 1, which was not made, so I will not call them.

We move on to the second group. With amendment No 5, it will be convenient to debate amendment No 6. The amendments deal with entitlement to the winter fuel payment and requiring the Department to report on the cost of pension provision and life expectancy in different occupational sectors.

**Mr A Maskey:** I beg to move amendment No 5: In page 2, line 17, at end insert

*"(8) This section shall be disregarded for the purposes of determining entitlement to Winter Fuel Payment in accordance with the Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000."*

The following amendment stood on the Marshalled List:

No 6: After clause 1, insert the following new clause:

***"Duty to report on the impact of health inequalities and occupation on the cost of pension provision for various occupational sectors of the population***

*1A. The Department for Social Development shall, within one year of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent, lay a report before the Assembly on the differences in the cost of pension provision for various occupational sectors of the population arising from health inequalities, including the impact of occupation on life expectancy." — [Mr A Maskey.]*

**Mr A Maskey:** Amendment No 5 — *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order, order. Can we have peace in the Assembly, please? We have a Member speaking, and there is a lot of background noise. I would prefer it if we were able to listen to the Member. Those who wish to leave, please leave.

**Mr A Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle. Arís. Let us have peace in our time at least. I have a piece of paper here somewhere that I need to refer to.

As a member of the Social Development Committee, I thank the officials from the Committee who supported all the Committee members during our consideration of the Bill at Committee Stage. I also thank departmental officials for their support. I thank in particular all the stakeholder organisations that came to the Committee and made their respective presentations.

Obviously, the amendment is very specific. It is quite self-explanatory and relatively simple and straightforward. Clearly, the key issue from the perspective of the members of the Social Development Committee and of my party has been fuel poverty. We were very pleased that the Committee embarked on a ground-breaking initiative by working together with all the other Committees on fuel poverty. Thankfully, the House will shortly have the report from that work to debate. That work involved eight of the Assembly Committees, all of which have some remit or responsibility for scrutinising their respective Departments, which have some role in relation to fuel poverty. I remind the House that we had a working meeting, a conference-type engagement with eight Assembly Committees, eight of the Executive Departments and well over 30 stakeholder organisations. There were almost 100

people, all of whom were relatively senior, if not the most senior, in their respective organisations and agencies, taking part in a wide-ranging discussion on fuel poverty.

One of the main issues that came up in that discussion was the impact that fuel poverty has on our older citizens. Some of the presentations and the figures included in them told us that somewhere in the region of 44% of households in the North suffer from fuel poverty. So, the argument and the logic behind the amendment is simply that a lot of older citizens are more vulnerable and more prone to the effects of cold weather and therefore are more in need of winter fuel support. Everybody has made that point, and no one has dissented from it. On that basis, the logic is that, if we increase the pensionable age from 60 to 65 for women and then from 65 to 66 for everyone, more of our citizens will fall into fuel poverty and into the category of people who need more support to deal with fuel poverty and fuel costs. The Minister has reminded us that the British Government Minister repeated recently their intention to continue the upward spiral of the pension age.

The amendment would disconnect eligibility for the fuel poverty payment from the pension age. If we increase the pension age, we will probably make more people worse off in respect of fuel poverty and increase the need for support. The amendment would break the link and leave things where they are, although that is not specified.

As the Minister explained, he and his Department are seeking to enact the Bill, which has been handed down from London. What we are trying to do is highlight the fact that that is not necessarily a good thing and is one of the more negative consequences of the Bill. I do not think that anyone dissented from the fact that many of our senior citizens are vulnerable to fuel poverty and need additional support. Therefore, the logic is that, if the pension age is increased, the number of people who will be prone to fuel poverty and fall into that trap will also increase.

I commend the Executive for recently extending eligibility for winter fuel payments. In my view, that vindicates the amendment, because the Executive recognise that there is a need for it. The effect of the Bill will be to increase that need. It is a fairly self-explanatory amendment, and I do not think that it needs a lot of debate.

I respect people's views on parity. It is a big issue, and it is not simple. The British Government have made it clear that their proposal to extend the age of pension eligibility is not simply about the fact that, thankfully, we are all growing older and are able to work longer. They have made it clear that it is, by and large, a financial transaction. They also clearly say that the costs of pensions are increasingly unsustainable. That may or may not be the case, and it has to be addressed. We do not have to address the issue here. It is not simply a matter of saying, "We will take the money from here and put it over there". I understand the logic of Members who spoke about that earlier. The state has to look at how we make pensions sustainable in the longer term. I accept that that is a complex and difficult challenge for all of us.

As I said, I respect the point about parity. I heard Members say that they were unionists and, therefore, accepted the principle of parity. I accept their view, and I am not second-guessing it. I do not wish to disrespect that argument, as

there is logic in it from their point of view. However, none of the proposals actually addresses local circumstances. That is why my party wants to make this amendment and supports the previous amendment.

We understand that, in some cases, there may be substantial costs attached. We do not believe that the arguments have yet been fully and properly explored directly with the British Government. We want that engagement to continue much more robustly, because therein lies what we hear from British Government representatives about greater flexibility. Having been the Chair of the Social Development Committee for almost a year, I have seen little evidence of it. However, I would dearly love to be able to explore that more fully and robustly. Who knows what the outcome might be?

I have no doubt that, in the time ahead, there will increasingly be arguments around regionalisation and whether we should deal with certain issues on the basis of parity or in some other way. I have no doubt that those arguments will come to our table in due course, and I do not think that we should necessarily fear them. However, it is incumbent on us, as an institution, to examine critically how we can best represent the interests of the people whom we were elected to serve. There is compelling evidence, which has been pointed out by a range of stakeholders and by the Department, that there are people here whose life expectancy is lower than in other regions. We are also talking about people's quality of life and their health profile, which is not as good a story as it perhaps is in other places. There are a lot of reasons for that, some of which have been rehearsed in the Chamber over recent years, and they will have to be explored further.

#### 12.30 pm

I ask Members to consider the amendment on its own merits. It would simply break the link between retirement and eligibility for winter fuel payments, as opposed to the outworking of the Bill, which means that people will be eligible only when they reach pension age. As we know, the Bill's purpose is to extend upwards the age at which people can retire. Therefore, on the basis of the compelling evidence presented to us, we firmly believe that the consequence of the Bill would be more of our older citizens becoming vulnerable to fuel poverty. That would be a backward step, and I urge Members to support the amendment on that basis.

**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 after lunchtime will be Question Time.

*The debate stood suspended.*

*The sitting was suspended at 12.31 pm.*



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

2.00 pm

## Oral Answers to Questions

### Justice

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question 8 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

#### Prison Service: Redundancy Scheme

1. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Justice whether he plans to instruct the Prison Service to provide officers who are leaving their posts under the redundancy scheme the option of taking their gratuity payments in the 2012-13 tax year. (AQO 1649/11-15)

**Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice):** One hundred and fifty one staff will leave the Prison Service on 31 March under the terms of the voluntary early retirement scheme. Their compensation in lieu of notice payment and the nine-month severance payment will be made before the end of this month. Their statutory lump sum and compensation payment will be made in April. All payments will be taxed within the 2011-12 tax year. That decision was taken following consultation with the Departmental Solicitor's Office, internal audit and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

**Mr Wells:** That is a very disappointing response from the Minister, because, as he knows, I asked that specific question when officials from the Prison Service came before the Committee. They assured me that tax could be taken in 2012-13. Furthermore, staff were advised by officers in the Prison Service that it would be in 2012-13, and, indeed, some of the written material made it clear that it could be taken in that year. His decision will mean that many prison officers will pay up to £2,000 extra in tax, simply because of the lack of flexibility that has been shown. Finally, HMRC has indicated to prison officers —

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

**Mr Wells:** — that it could not care less when the tax is paid. This is not, therefore, advantageous to his officers.

**Mr Ford:** If there was a question in there, I will attempt to answer it. Mr Wells says that HMRC "could not care less" what year the tax is paid. That is certainly not the understanding I have, which is a clear interpretation of tax law, which is that, since the pay becomes available in the current tax year, the tax is due on the basis of the current tax year.

Mr Wells talks about prison officers potentially losing up to £2,000 because of this decision. It is certainly the case that some prison officers will lose in the region of £2,000 or, perhaps, slightly more because tax is liable in this tax year. However, it should also be made clear that, as a result of negotiations between the Prison Service and HMRC, a number of prison officers will save up to £5,000 through legitimate ways of dealing with the tax issue, as opposed to what would have been regarded by HMRC as tax avoidance.

**Mr P Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Can the Minister inform us whether he has seen the legal advice? Can he confirm that it is lawful to place a restrictive covenant on the award of severance packages to prison officers?

**Mr Ford:** I struggle to find the connection between the original question and that. As I said to the House yesterday — I am not sure whether Mr Maskey was present — I have not personally read the advice. I do not need to read the advice in all cases.

**Mr Hussey:** I thank the Minister for his answers. Mr Wells asked a question to which I did not hear an answer, so I will ask again: were prison officers given advice that the outworkings of the gratuity payments would be in the 2012-13 year? My understanding is that they were, but I ask the Minister whether they were given that advice.

**Mr Ford:** It is certainly my understanding that information was conveyed, at one stage, to members of the Justice Committee that payments would be taxable, potentially next year. I believe that was said in November last year. That was corrected at a meeting of the Justice Committee in February this year. I am not in a position to say what information may or may not have been supplied to officers. It is regrettable that that mistake was made at a Committee meeting last year, but it was corrected subsequently.

**Mrs D Kelly:** Given the success of the gratuity scheme, in that 500 serving prison officers applied to leave the service, how will they be facilitated? What is the time frame for the appointment of the replacement personnel?

**Mr Ford:** I thank Mrs Kelly for the question. The only information that can be given specifically at this point is that 151 officers are leaving this week, and, because of the wrong pension calculations in the Department of Finance and Personnel, a further six will leave during April. It is not possible to give a firm date when others will leave; that will depend on the needs of the service. Also, as I have pointed out, officers could lose their compensation in lieu of notice if they are given notice.

It is expected that, in the autumn, the first of the 200 new entrants who applied last month will come into post and will be fully operational by the end of the year.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** As Mr Mitchel McLaughlin is not in his place, we will move on.

#### Office of the Police Ombudsman: Accounting Officer

3. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the role of his Department in changing the position of accounting officer within the Office of the Police Ombudsman. (AQO 1651/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** The accounting officer for the Office of the Police Ombudsman has always been the chief executive. Accounting officer responsibility changed from the acting chief executive to the interim chief executive following his appointment at the end of January this year. My Department's role was to designate formally the incoming interim chief executive as accounting officer for the Office of the Police Ombudsman. My permanent secretary, as departmental accounting officer of the DOJ, wrote to the

interim chief executive on 30 January 2012 to confirm the change of accounting officer role from the acting chief executive to the interim chief executive.

**Mr G Kelly:** I thank the Minister for his answer so far. He will be aware of the interference in the Office of the Police Ombudsman. Indeed, his Department was criticised about that. Does he understand why the interim chief executive being put forward by the Department of Justice will further worry people about what might be still going on in the office? Have any changes been made, especially structural changes or the regrading and demotion of senior staff, by the interim chief executive?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Could we have the question, please?

**Mr G Kelly:** That is the question.

**Mr Ford:** I am not aware of interference in the office by my officials. The interim chief executive was not put forward by the Department of Justice. The ombudsman sought the assistance of the Department of Justice in identifying an interim chief executive of an appropriate grade. The permanent secretary of my Department contacted the head of the Civil Service and DFP about that. I cannot see how that constitutes interference.

**Mr Campbell:** Will the Minister of Justice assure the House and the wider community that the interim chief executive and others in the Police Ombudsman's office will not be subject to political pressure, as has certainly been the case in the past four or five months, particularly from members of Sinn Féin?

**Mr Ford:** Unfortunately, it would be a foolish Minister who came to the House and suggested that any public official would not be subject to political pressure. I can assure the House that, to the best of my knowledge, the interim chief executive will resist any such pressure.

**Mrs Dobson:** The McCusker report found that the accountability arrangements for the accounting officer role needed to be clarified. Are the changes representative of the issues highlighted by Tony McCusker?

**Mr Ford:** I thank Mrs Dobson for her question. The long-term arrangements will have to be determined by the new ombudsman when he or she takes up post. At this stage, the issue is that the interim chief executive carries certain responsibilities. However, it is clear from the McCusker report that issues about the grading and staffing of the office as a whole will have to be addressed. That can be carried through only when the new ombudsman is in a position to make those decisions.

**Ms Lo:** The Minister's answers so far make it clear that his Department has acted entirely properly and in the best interests of an effectively functioning Police Ombudsman's office. Does he agree that those who are swift to accuse his Department of wrongdoing should be just as swift to acknowledge when his Department acts in an entirely appropriate fashion, as it has clearly done in relation to this matter? I do not mean now.

**Mr Ford:** That would be nice. I am not necessarily sure that, in the Chamber, any Minister gets recognition when things are done right, but we can certainly expect the kicks when things are done wrong.

As far as I am concerned, the Department of Justice has acted entirely properly in seeking to ensure the continuity of the ombudsman's office, given the difficulties that the office has been in. I welcome my friend's suggestion that that is right and should be acknowledged by all parts of the House, although I am not holding my breath.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** As Mr Seán Lynch is not in his place, we will move on.

## Prison Reform

5. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Justice to outline his prison reform objectives for the next six months. (AQO 1653/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** As I stated yesterday, the pace of prison reform is accelerating. Over the next six months, we plan to build on the foundations that have been laid. My objectives focus on four main delivery areas: structural reform in the Prison Service; increasing the skills and capacity of staff in NIPS; preparing the way for cultural change in NIPS; and developing a more efficient and effective justice system.

Measures for delivering structural reform include the transfer of healthcare staff to the South Eastern Trust on 1 April; ensuring improved accountability and governance arrangements; and a number of pivotal reviews, including those of corporate governance and of learning and skills for prisoners. I also plan to publish a new prison estate strategy next month.

To increase the skills and capacity of staff in the Prison Service, we will develop a range of fit-for-purpose training programmes for new and existing staff on which a truly professionalised service can be built, and we will delayer the current seven-tier management structure down to four to improve accountability. Other measures will begin to effect cultural change and include letting go long-serving staff who do not want to be part of a reformed NIPS; the recruitment of new custody officers, with the first appointees expected to be operational by the new year; and the introduction, by the end of June, of a new disciplinary system for uniformed staff.

Other measures will improve the wider justice system and include work to ensure that the prison reforms are properly aligned with the approach being taken by the Department to offending right across the justice system; the publication of a strategic framework for reducing offending; the introduction of a faster, fairer justice Bill before the end of the year; and further consideration of statutory time limits by the Criminal Justice Board.

**Mr Lyttle:** I thank the Minister for his answer and for the progress made in the past six months. What arrangements have been put in place to oversee what is clearly a complex programme of work?

**Mr Ford:** The key issue in the oversight of that programme of work is the set-up of the group that I chair as part of the recommendations of the prison review team. It will meet quarterly and includes independent members. It had its first meeting last month and will meet again in May. Given the experience of those who serve on the group, I believe that we have a very sound way of ensuring that oversight is maintained in the process. After each meeting, the group will ensure that a report is submitted to the Justice Committee

so that it can also play its role in the proper oversight of the Department. There will also be a departmental reform group, which will be led by the permanent secretary and include participation by the probation service and DHSSPS. The Department has also scheduled a number of workshops, working with other Departments throughout the spring of this year to consider cross-cutting and strategic issues.

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle agus buíochas don Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answers.

The Minister mentioned his statement to the House yesterday on his objectives for the next six months. Does he feel that he will be able to deliver the full-body scanners to Maghaberry and other prisons in the next six months?

**Mr Ford:** I thank Mr McCartney for his question. I can state only what I said yesterday, which is that we are not sure what the timescale will be, because the timescale for some of the processes is dependent on licensing arrangements that have to be considered at UK national level. However, I repeat my assurance to Mr McCartney that we will work as fast as we can in the Northern Ireland Prison Service to move on the issue of full-body scanners and get pilots under way.

**Lord Morrow:** There is a thought abroad that the Minister's prison reforms have more to do with looking after the comforts of criminals than looking after and delivering justice to victims. Does the Minister accept that it is vital that the general public have confidence in anything that he does, that everything that he does is seen to be fair, open and transparent and that the reforms also consider victims' needs?

## 2.15 pm

**Mr Ford:** Yes, I certainly consider it necessary that everything should be fair, open and transparent. On the specific issue of victims, the Department has been doing a lot of work around the needs of victims and witnesses, some of which Lord Morrow will know from his time as Chair of the Justice Committee. A lot of that depends on the work currently being done by the Justice Committee around meeting the needs of victims, which will inform the work to be done by the Department in the coming months.

**Mr A Maginness:** The Minister referred to the oversight body. It is right and proper that there be such a body to look after the conduct of the reforms, but the Minister chairs it himself. I suggest that it might be better if there were an independent chair instead, in order to validate the independence and give that body more power.

**Mr Ford:** I see where Mr Maginness is coming from, but any suggestion that the personalities who serve on that oversight committee would somehow be overly leaned on by me as chair was not shown to be the case at the initial meeting, and I do not expect it to be the case going forward. The Member is a member of the Justice Committee, which will receive a report after each meeting of the oversight group. That will enable the Committee to also hold the Department to account. I think those measures are sufficiently open and transparent to ensure that the oversight work is done correctly, but it will be up to him and other members of the Committee to hold me and the oversight group to account.

## Office of the Police Ombudsman: Criminal Justice Inspection Report

6. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Justice what progress has been made in relation to the implementation of the Criminal Justice Inspection report on the Office of the Police Ombudsman. (AQO 1654/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** On publication of the Criminal Justice Inspection report, I made clear the need for the Office of the Police Ombudsman to take swift and robust action in response. The office developed an action plan to implement the recommendations in full. It also committed itself to seeking independent validation of the implementation process from CJINI. Since publication of the report, I have received regular updates from both the ombudsman's office and Dr Michael Maguire on the implementation of the recommendations.

I am pleased to advise that there has been progress on a number of fronts, particularly in reforming the processes around the investigation and reporting of historical cases. Criminal Justice Inspection has also confirmed that the proposals for the development of the historical directorate are sensible and provide a basis for a more robust approach to the investigation of historical cases. Further work is required in order to implement the recommendations fully, and that will take some further time. However, I have been assured that the ombudsman's office recognises the challenges and importance of delivering on the action plan in a timely manner, and I am pleased that priority is being given to this work.

**Mr Boylan:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's answer. Will the Minister spell out who will lead any review of the confidential unit included in the suggested work, and when it will be completed?

**Mr Ford:** The simple answer is that the new ombudsman, who I believe is close to being appointed, will lead that work. That appointment has been at ministerial level with the First Minister and deputy First Minister. The new ombudsman will, I hope, be in post as soon as can be and will have the responsibility of leading the work around the confidential unit.

I am also pleased to tell the House that the business case has been agreed to grant another £10 million to engage in the historical work of the ombudsman's office, which will ensure that staff are in post when the new ombudsman is able to take up responsibilities to deal with these historical cases which have been blighting the work of the office for so long.

**Mr Givan:** The Minister will be aware that the report highlighted the fact that police confidence in entrusting the ombudsman's office with highly confidential information required the establishment of the confidential unit. Does the Minister share my concerns that any reduction in that confidentiality could lead to a loss of police confidence, which is vital to the success of any ombudsman's office?

**Mr Ford:** The Committee Chair highlights the importance of Police Service confidence in the ombudsman's office. It is also absolutely clear that we need to ensure that there is public confidence. There is no benefit in having confidence on one side and not on the other. I trust that that will be something that the new ombudsman can take up. I recognise the points that he has made about the operation of the confidential unit in dealing with those difficult cases.

**Mr Kinahan:** One of Criminal Justice Inspection's recommendations was for a skills and competency audit of staff. Has that been taken forward? If not, why not? When will it be complete? If it has been carried out, what did it find?

**Mr Ford:** The best answer that I can give is that I understand that a skills and competency audit has been carried out. However, it is not part of my function to know exactly what the detail of it is. I will see what information is available in the Department and write to the Member if necessary.

## Prisons: Strip-searches

7. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Justice what measures he intends to take to reduce the frequency of strip-searches in prisons. (AQO 1655/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** Following the review of the full-body searching of prisoners, which was published in December 2010, and the August 2010 agreement, the frequency of full-body searching in our prisons has already been significantly reduced.

In its final report, the prison review team concluded:

*"Full-body searching is a procedure which is intrusive and invades the privacy of all prisoners, but is justified as proportionate and necessary to prevent the smuggling of contraband or weapons."*

It goes on to say:

*"If other less intrusive and more effective electronic methods become available, they should be piloted, and their use considered."*

In line with that, the Prison Service has subsequently conducted a further review of full-body imaging scanners for potential use in prisons. On the basis of that review, as I have previously said, I intend to initiate a pilot of full-body imaging scanners as soon as the necessary authorisation for use of that technology in prisons is obtained. The outcome of such a pilot, when it is introduced, may reduce the frequency of full-body searching.

**Mr D Bradley:** Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé ansin agus ba mhaith liom an méid seo a fhiafraí de.

I thank the Minister for his answer. In the meantime, will he help to recommence dialogue between prison officials and republican prisoners in Roe House in order to bring that continuing dispute to an end?

**Mr Ford:** I certainly share Mr Bradley's desire that we should bring the dispute to an end. Certainly, as I understand it, the offer of a prisoner forum has been made to those in Roe House, both in Roe 3 and Roe 4. However, prisoners have been unwilling to engage in that form of discussion, which, I believe, would be the best way, given that it is in line with the August 2010 agreement, to carry forward discussions on the management of Roe House. The important issue for me is to ensure that we provide the best possible regime for all prisoners in custody, commensurate with their human rights and the need to provide safety and security for staff and prisoners.

**Mr McCarthy:** Can the Minister confirm my understanding that the agreement reached with separated republican prisoners related only to searching within the prison and

that the aspects of that agreement relating to searching have all been implemented in full?

**Mr Ford:** Yes. The August agreement was concerned with internal movement. The issue of searching prisoners on entering and leaving prison remains the same in every prison in Northern Ireland, as it is, as I understand, in England, Wales and Scotland. At present, full-body searching is the best arrangement that we have. However, as I made clear in the answer that I have just given to Mr McCartney, we are seeking technological solutions that would meet that need.

**Ms J McCann:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Given that, in answers to previous questions, the Minister said that he was committed to putting in place full-body imaging scanners, can he communicate that to prisoners in some way so that they know about his intention to do that?

**Mr Ford:** I would have thought that the number of times that I have answered questions in the Chamber on that issue would have made it fairly clear publicly. It has certainly been reported in the media. However, I have no difficulty in ensuring that anybody who is aware of and concerned about the needs of prisoners is aware of our intention to move to a technological solution as soon as we can find a suitable one.

**Mr Copeland:** Can the Minister outline the nature of the pilot of the full-body imaging scanner that he intends to initiate, the cost of the exercise and, how, at the conclusion of the exercise, a decision will be taken to assess its success or otherwise?

**Mr Ford:** I think that Mr Copeland goes a bit beyond the precise detail of the pilot. I will happily inform the House when we have some understanding of what technological solutions can be piloted, after taking into account potential licensing issues, what is being done and the potential cost, although I suspect that it would be only an estimate at this stage. We will then have to ascertain how effective the process is compared with the existing search arrangements, and that will require a detailed study. If we simply discussed it at this point, I suspect that the discussion would not be particularly well informed.

## Crime: Victims

9. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the measures he is taking to address the needs of victims of crime. (AQO 1657/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** Addressing the needs of victims and witnesses of crime has been high on my list of priorities since I became Minister. I have published a code of practice for victims of crime, two new guides to the criminal justice system, a handbook for adult victims of sexual violence and guidance on achieving best evidence. I have also brought forward legislation to expand the availability of special measures for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses. Victims' champions have been appointed for each of the criminal justice agencies, and I have met them to discuss how we can best work together to provide a more seamless and responsive service for victims.

I am encouraged that the latest Northern Ireland victim and witnesses survey statistical report, which was published on 15 March, shows that victim and witness satisfaction has increased from 67.9% to 70% since devolution. Although that is a modest increase, it is statistically significant and indicates that the measures that have been taken so far are having a positive effect.

Later this year, I plan to publish for consultation a new five-year strategy for victims and witnesses. I have given a commitment that the proposed new strategy will be substantially informed by the outcome of the Justice Committee's recent inquiry into the services provided to victims and witnesses of crime. I look forward to receiving the Committee's report in the near future.

Work is also under way on a number of new initiatives, including the development of a victim impact scheme, the establishment of witness care units and the introduction of a witness intermediary service. It is my sincere hope that all those measures will help to improve the victim's journey through the criminal justice system, and I will personally oversee their delivery.

**Mr Lunn:** I thank the Minister for his very full answer. He referred to the appointment of victims' champions. Can he expand on the role of those champions and say from where the idea came?

**Mr Ford:** I thank Mr Lunn for his supplementary question. The initial proposal came from Criminal Justice Inspection, when it carried out its thematic inspection report on the care and treatment of victims and witnesses. As a result of that, I wrote to the different agencies across the criminal justice system shortly before Christmas inviting them to nominate a victims' champion at senior level for their organisation.

The role of victims' champions is to provide an organisational focus on the way each organisation treats victims and witnesses and, hopefully, where necessary, to challenge attitudes and behaviours. A couple of weeks ago, I had a useful meeting with victims' champions across the different agencies, and we had a very productive discussion on working collaboratively to improve services for victims and, indeed, to establish an amount of collaborative work, which is already under way. I will seek regular reports from the victims' champions to ensure that that progress is maintained.

**Mr B McCrea:** Minister, are you aware of the deficiency in a number of court buildings where victims of crime regularly come into contact with those accused of committing the crime? Will he undertake to review the court infrastructure?

**Mr Ford:** I assure Mr McCrea that the issue of court infrastructure is under review at the moment. One of the key issues is to ensure that we provide better facilities for victims and witnesses, including, where necessary, facilities to separate them from perpetrators or alleged perpetrators of crime. It is not easy given the current state of the estate, which consists of many buildings that, although beautiful and historic, are not adequate for modern needs.

## Regional Development

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I must tell Members that question 1 has been withdrawn. A written answer will be provided.

2.30 pm

### Gritting: Lyndhurst Gardens, Belfast

2. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister for Regional Development if Lyndhurst Gardens, Belfast, can be included in the Roads Service gritting schedule. (AQO 1664/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):** As I have previously advised the Member, Lyndhurst Gardens does not meet the criteria for inclusion in the salting schedule. There are alternative routes, such as Westway Drive, that are treated and can be used to provide access to the main road network. The Member will also be aware that Roads Service has provided two salt boxes at that location for use by the public on a self-help basis.

Nevertheless, I empathise with the residents of the area and appreciate the difficulties that they encounter during severe wintry weather. I am prepared to look at the issue again and will discuss it with the divisional roads manager prior to meeting the Member. I hope that that may lead to an outcome that is satisfactory to all parties.

**Mr Humphrey:** I thank the Minister for his welcome reply. It may perhaps seem strange that I am asking about gritting on a day such as today, but I commend the Minister for his answer. I have previously raised the point with departmental officials that the route through Westway Drive does not provide access to the estate. The area is at the top of the Black Mountain, and it has a steep gradient that provides considerable difficulties to the significant number of senior citizens who live in a settled community there. I very much welcome such a meeting with the Minister, and I thank him for his response.

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I also pay tribute to him for the doughty way in which he has pursued the issue, even in today's pleasant weather conditions.

Being mindful of wintry conditions, I think that it is important that we look at all aspects of winter preparation. I can inform the House that, on a yearly basis after the winter period, Roads Service reviews how it has performed and assesses whether there are any outstanding issues. Clearly, the Member has raised one such issue. We will look at it and meet him at some stage to discuss it further.

**Mr Ó hOisín:** Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire don fhreagra sin. What are the Minister's intentions about increasing cross-border co-operation in the gritting of roads, perhaps by bringing councils together, North and South?

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question, albeit that it seems a long way from Lyndhurst Gardens. *[Laughter.]* When there is common cause, we will co-operate. However, my understanding is that, in the system that is operated in the Republic of Ireland — I would be very grateful if the Member would pay some attention to the answer to the question he posed — there are differences in emphasis and approach that may not be easily reconciled. We are happy to look at instances in which meaningful co-operation can be operated successfully.

**Mr McDevitt:** Does the Minister believe that the current gritting policy is fit for purpose? Is it perhaps time to carry out a significant review of the management and provision of gritting services, particularly in our towns and cities? I am sure that the Minister knows that the experience in the city of Belfast is less than satisfactory. Many large urban residential areas are left ungritted and, the residents would argue, without access to proper gritting services.

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I refer him to the answer that I gave some moments ago. On an ongoing basis, Roads Service reviews the practices that are engaged in over the winter season, and we will continue to do that. However, the priority has to be the main strategic roads network, and it is not economically viable or possible to grit every road, lane-way or footpath. So, we have to make the available resources count to the best advantage. I am happy to continue to look at the situation. I can say that salting 28% of the road network covers 80% of the main traffic movements. Since becoming Minister, I have instigated dialogue with and have had a very good response from local government on the subject of footpaths and town centre areas. I hope to build on that in the future so that we can make as much progress as possible in a sensible and cost-effective way.

### A6 Randalstown to Toomebridge

3. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the A6 Randalstown to Toomebridge dualling scheme. (AQO 1665/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** Roads Service has advised that this scheme was subject to a public inquiry in 2007 and, in response to a recommendation in the inspector's report, officials have been examining alternative junction proposals for Bellshill Road and Annaghmore Road, Castledawson. These alternative proposals were the subject of a further public inquiry, which took place on 13 and 14 February 2012. Roads Service hopes to complete statutory procedures for the scheme later this year. However, I should explain that there is no allocation for this scheme in the current Budget period up to 2015 to allow the scheme to proceed to construction. On that basis, and subject to the outcome of the public inquiry and funding determined by the investment strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-2021, it is anticipated that any work on the ground will not commence before 2015-16 at the earliest.

**Mr McLaughlin:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Having apologised to the Minister, I apologise to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for missing my question to the Minister of Justice.

I thank the Minister for his detailed answer. He has anticipated the issue that I intended to follow up on, which was whether he believes that he can secure the funding for the scheme. He has outlined the timeline, and I thank him for that. Is he confident that the funds for the scheme are still secure?

**Mr Kennedy:** The Member will want to consult Hansard to see the reply that I gave him. I will repeat that it is anticipated that any work on the ground will not commence before 2015-16 at the earliest, but that, of course, is subject to the outcome of the public inquiry and funding, which will, largely, be determined by the investment strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI). The ISNI strategy, he will know, has been consulted on and is now subject to further work. It has not yet reached the Executive table for approval and, obviously then, approval by this House, but its content will be key in bringing forward this scheme and other schemes of this nature.

**Mrs Overend:** Does the Minister agree that it is somewhat disingenuous of Members, particularly Sinn Féin Members, to complain about the delay or deferral of major roads schemes such as the A6 project, when the Budget 2011-15,

which was proposed by the former Minister last January and voted for by them, clearly set out that this and other worthy schemes would not proceed until 2015 at least, because of the decisions to prioritise other roads?

**Mr Kennedy:** I thank the Member for her supplementary question. She makes a very fair point, in that having agreed at Executive level the various economic programmes, the Programme for Government and, presumably, at an early stage, the ISNI strategy, it will be incumbent on Members to bear that in mind when they particularly advance the cause of projects or schemes in their areas. It is all very well to play populist politics — many people have built a career on that, and I do not exclude myself from that either — but we need to be cautious that we do not exceed ourselves and make promises that we cannot realistically keep.

**Mr McGlone:** Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle agus mo bhuíochas leis an Aire chomh maith. I thank the Minister for his response. I am concerned principally, although not exclusively, about the part of the road that is in my constituency. I heard Mrs Overend's point that a number of parties in this House voted for that Budget, and we are, perhaps, living with the consequences now. A number of environmental concerns were expressed by residents on the south Derry side of the proposed extended route of the thoroughfare. Can the Minister provide assurances that those environmental concerns, and, indeed, further concerns were expressed, but they are, obviously —

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question, please.

**Mr McGlone:** — part of the public inquiry. Will those be factored into consideration of the route and the sensitivities of the environment on its way through?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** I am sure that the Minister has got the gist of that question.

**Mr Kennedy:** Yes, I just about got that, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I assure him that due consideration will be given to all the points that he raised, particularly through the public inquiry stage and the outcome of the inspector's report, which will be dealt with not only by my officials but by me.

**Lord Morrow:** Is the Minister yet in possession of the public inquiry into the A5? If so, is he prepared to share it with the rest of us?

**Mr Kennedy:** Lord Morrow has leapfrogged the mountain to go to the A5 rather than Randalstown and Castledawson. I am happy to say that the inspector's report on the A5 has been received. Officials are working on that. It has not yet reached my desk. I will be very pleased to inform Lord Morrow about the outcome of my deliberations on that when I am in a position to do so, and I might even wait for some advice that, in the past, has not been forthcoming from him regarding his clear view on the A5. I am happy to deal with that in due course, and I do not wish to raise the temperature or for Lord Morrow to be excited unduly. We will give it careful consideration, and, in due time, he will learn its outcome.

### Road Fixtures

4. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action Roads Service is taking to clean and repair broken road fixtures. (AQO 1666/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** Roads Service carries out regular inspections of all public roads and footways to ensure that essential response maintenance is identified and completed as necessary. During those inspections, all defects are noted, including, for example, defective signs and signs needing cleaning to improve their visibility. The frequency of the inspections depends on the type of road and the volume of vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Town centres and major traffic routes are inspected monthly, while all other roads and footways are inspected at either two-monthly or four-monthly intervals.

In addition, to maintain street lighting and sign illumination equipment in good condition, Roads Service carries out ongoing cycles of night-time scouting and follow-up repairs. Lighting inspections are undertaken every two weeks during winter and every four weeks in summer. Any defects that are found are programmed for remedial action and are normally repaired within five working days. That will also include the cleaning of the equipment, when appropriate. Repairs to traffic signals are carried out under Roads Service's traffic signal maintenance contract. The contract also provides for the cleaning of traffic signal lenses and a quarterly inspection at each traffic signal installation. Any reported damage or operational faults will have remedial work carried out by the maintenance company, in accordance with response times specified in the contract.

**Ms Brown:** I thank the Minister for his answer. I am sure that he and other Members may have noticed that, over the past number of months, road signage, in addition to street light boxes, on major commuter routes have been in a state of disrepair, posing safety concerns. What is the Minister doing to ensure that such problems are seen to efficiently, which will secure the safety of all road users?

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Member for the supplementary question, and I confirm that Roads Service takes very seriously the maintenance of signs and signals and all the issues that I referred to in the original answer. That remains the case.

## 2.45 pm

**Mr Lynch:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like Mr McLaughlin, I also apologise for not being here. I can only put it down to confusion around the new summer time. Minister, given the very mild winter that we have had, how much additional funding is available for road repairs?

**Mr Kennedy:** The clock seemed to spring forward there fairly dramatically in terms of the licence given to the question.

It is not a matter of saving money or having money in reserve because of winter maintenance. The winter preparations are put in place in the expectation that those resources will be required, and, therefore, it is important that they are in place. We have had a very mild winter, and about 46,000 tons of salt have been used to salt the road network. I pay tribute to all the staff who undertook those duties in very unsocial hours on behalf not only of the Department but of the wider community. As I said, we will continue to review the winter practices. I cannot indicate that there are no savings accrued. Simply, we continue to learn lessons and apply good practice in all our winter preparation.

**Mr A Maginness:** If the Minister cares to visit north Belfast, he will see that there is not very much maintenance of roads

signage, and I do not share his rosy assessment of the way in which the Department is carrying out its work. What moneys are being spent on the repair and upgrade of roads signage and safety barriers throughout the North? When I say "the North", I do not just mean north Belfast.

**Mr Kennedy:** You meant Northern Ireland I assume. You did not, presumably, mean the occupied Six Counties. *[Laughter.]* It is a long time since anybody said that, thank goodness.

I am concerned at the Member's earlier remarks about his perception of the condition of signage in north Belfast, and I am happy to look at particular instances. The contract for maintenance of road signs, traffic lights and lamp posts is undertaken on a Northern Ireland basis, and, if possible, we will extrapolate those figures and provide them to the Member.

## Narrow Water Bridge

5. **Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposal to build a bridge at Narrow Water between County Down and County Louth. (AQO 1667/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** I can advise the Member that the proposal to build a bridge at Narrow Water between County Down and County Louth is being taken forward by Louth County Council in association with Newry and Mourne District Council, and my Department has no direct involvement in the project. In those circumstances, I am not in a position to provide an update on the proposal.

**Mrs McKeivitt:** Given that the Programme for Government has outlined the importance of tourism and job creation in the tourism sector, and given the important role that our road infrastructure has to play to help deliver that, what attempts has the Minister made to help deliver that important North/South cross-border tourism bridge project?

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question, and I understand that she and colleagues have been pressing for the project. As I said, my Department has never, at any stage, been the lead Department on the project, and I confirm that that was the case even under my predecessor, the former Minister, the Member for Newry and Armagh. I have had meetings with and had representations from Newry and Mourne District Council and Louth County Council recently, and I have met members from the local chambers of trade and commerce in Warrenpoint, Kilkeel and Dundalk, and I understand the emphasis that was placed on the project from a tourism point of view. However, as roads Minister, it is my chief responsibility to improve the overall strategic road network. That is best served in this area by bringing forward the southern relief road from Newry, which is now in its early stages of preparation. I hope that the Member will support that project as we move to improve the infrastructural main strategic road network all over Northern Ireland.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Perhaps you would expand on your previous answer, Minister, and give us your assessment of the economic benefit of the bridge compared with, for example, the Ballynahinch bypass, which would also benefit County Down, or, more broadly, with additional finance for the road maintenance budget.

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Member for his question. He raises a challenge that all Members should consider when talking about upgrading the strategic road network, and, indeed, projects such as the Ballynahinch bypass. The Member has organised meetings for me to attend in Ballynahinch so that I might understand the strength of feeling on that issue. I pay tribute to him for that. In comparison with other schemes, it is largely a tourism project, like the bridge project at Narrow Water. Of course, money is tight. We are waiting for the investment strategy to be published and agreed, and many of the key decisions will depend on that. Improving the overall road infrastructure remains my key objective. Tourism projects might best be served by the tourism Minister.

**Mr W Clarke:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister believes that it is not his responsibility to provide road infrastructure to enable tourists to get to their destination. I disagree with that. I believe that the Minister has a responsibility. If the Minister did not have the resources in his Department, did he bring a paper to the Executive seeking a contribution from his ministerial colleagues?

**Mr Kennedy:** Although I am grateful to the Member for raising the question, it begs a further question from me on why his party colleague, the previous Minister for Regional Development, Conor Murphy, who was four years in post, did not bring such a paper or seek such approval.

### Roads: Omagh to Enniskillen

6. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department is taking to reduce travel times between Omagh and Enniskillen. (AQO 1668/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** I am pleased to advise that Roads Service has committed to the construction of two major road improvement schemes along the A32 Omagh to Enniskillen route. Those are at Drumskinny, which has an overall estimated scheme cost of £1.8 million and is now nearing completion, and at Shannaragh — I hope that I got that right, otherwise I will be criticised — which has an overall scheme cost of £7.3 million. Work on that has just recently commenced, with a view to completion in March 2013.

Together, those schemes will improve the quality of the route, enhance road safety and reduce travel times. However, the delivery of any further schemes along the route will be determined by the investment strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021, consultation on which concluded recently.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Is his Department in discussion with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety about the strategic importance of the A32 in relation to, for example, the regular ambulance traffic between Omagh and Enniskillen? Will he give a bit more detail about future schemes?

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He will recall that the former Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, my party colleague Michael McGimpsey, did indeed make a contribution to the A32 scheme — the Cherrymount Link scheme — which commenced in October 2011 and remains programmed for February 2013. The total value of the priority schemes that

are listed in the A32 strategy is in the region of £20 million. However, as I have said, the progression of the remaining schemes that are identified in that strategy is dependent on the availability of funding and the satisfactory completion of the statutory consultation process.

**Mr Byrne:** I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he accept that the ambulance travel times for patients from Omagh to Enniskillen are not really acceptable given the nature of the road? Will he state what target times are expected, given the improvements that he outlined?

**Mr Kennedy:** I am grateful to the Member for his concern. This issue has been raised by him and others. We continue to look at the situation through Translink and initiatives that are supported by the rural transport fund. There is some desire to improve accessibility to hospital appointments etc. The Member will know that we are working on it and will continue to see how things can be improved. It is not simple or straightforward; there are financial considerations. A pilot scheme is envisaged for getting to appointments at Altnagelvin Area Hospital. We will continue to work on that and make progress.

**Mr Elliott:** I thank the Minister for that. Given that the A32 is a priority regarding the hospital provision, obviously, another priority in extension to that would be the Enniskillen southern bypass. Does the Minister have any plans to progress that quickly?

**Mr Kennedy:** I thank the Member for raising again with me the Enniskillen bypass. It is very close to his heart as well as being in his constituency. We are bringing forward the scheme in its preparatory stages, but much of the finance that we can allocate to it will depend on the outcome of the ISNI. I am aware of that scheme and others around Northern Ireland; I think of schemes like the A6, the Dungiven bypass, the A26 and the bypasses for Ballynahinch, Magherafelt and Cookstown. There are any amount of projects that I, as roads Minister, want to bring forward subject to the available finance. I will look for support from Members of the House and members of the Executive as we seek to achieve that.

### Roads: Grass and Weeds

7. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions his Department has had with the Housing Executive and local councils about the co-ordination of grass cutting and weed control. (AQO 1669/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** Roads Service cuts grass in areas that are deemed to be part of the public road to prevent overgrowth onto carriageways and footway surfaces and to prevent the obstruction of sight lines and traffic signs. Such grass-cutting operations are carried out for road safety reasons and not for cosmetic or amenity purposes. In contrast, grass cutting that is undertaken by the Housing Executive and district councils is primarily for cosmetic or amenity purposes. Therefore, different standards are applicable, with the frequency of grass cutting that is carried out for cosmetic or amenity purposes being significantly greater than for Roads Service's road-safety-related activities. Roads Service also has a number of partnerships with district councils. Some councils wish to have a higher standard of grass cutting in some urban areas for aesthetic or amenity purposes than that provided under the Roads Service policy. In those cases, councils accept responsibility for the work



and are reimbursed for the number of cuts that are required under the Roads Service policy, which is five cuts a year in urban areas. I got there eventually, I think.

All weed spraying that is required on publicly adopted roads is carried out by Roads Service contractors. On occasions, there may be some communication with councils regarding areas that require additional attention. I am keen to identify any potential efficiencies that can be achieved through enhanced collaborative working between Roads Service, councils and the Housing Executive. I plan to meet my counterparts the Minister of the Environment and the Minister for Social Development to explore the options.

**3.00 pm**

## Assembly Commission

### Assembly Commission: Forward Programme

1. **Lord Morrow** asked the Assembly Commission to outline its forward programme up to 2015, including an estimate of costs. (AQO 1678/11-15)

**Mr Weir:** The Assembly Commission has a statutory responsibility under section 40(4) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to:

*“provide the Assembly, or ensure that the Assembly is provided, with the property, staff and services required for the Assembly’s purposes.”*

To meet that statutory obligation, the Assembly Commission recently agreed a corporate strategy for the next four years. That strategy has been copied to all Members and is available on AssISt.

The Commission sees an Assembly that builds a better future for the people of Northern Ireland through fostering a peaceful, stable and prosperous society. Our vision is to best serve the Assembly in that task by being at the forefront of providing outstanding and progressive parliamentary services. The corporate strategy sets out three distinct aims: first, to provide outstanding parliamentary services; secondly, to influence, enable and deliver change; and thirdly, to be an effective and progressive organisation.

The strategy will be delivered through directorate business plans for each functional area in the Assembly secretariat and through a number of investment projects, such as the e-Committees project, the roof replacement project and the replacement of IT systems. The Commission’s running costs budget is set to fall by 8.9% from £48.4 million in 2010-11 to £44.08 million in 2014-15. However, the Commission recognises the need to offer political leadership in prudent financial management and will seek to deliver the same high-quality services to the Assembly and its Members but with that reduced budget.

**Lord Morrow:** I thank Mr Weir for his fairly detailed response and for outlining in some detail the four-year programme that the Commission has undertaken. I note that he said that spend will fall by some 9% — I think that he said 8.9%. In these austere times, I suspect that that is something that the House will welcome. Can he assure the House that

the Commission is, in fact, fit for purpose and that it has adequate resources to carry out this programme of work over the next four years?

**Mr Weir:** I can give that assurance to the Member. Obviously, the Commission, and, indeed, the Assembly itself, should not sit in some sort of ivory tower. In circumstances in which there are cutbacks to the overall block grant in Northern Ireland, the Assembly has to take its share of the pain. However, the Commission has introduced an organisation-wide review of all business areas to ensure that services are delivered in the most efficient manner. It is entirely possible that the nature of the delivery of some services in some areas will change as a result of the reviews, but the programme for those reviews means that nothing will happen without wide-ranging consultation with Members as the Commission’s key stakeholders.

**Mrs Overend:** How does the Commission value the Assembly roadshows that were held recently? Does it intend to promote those again in the future?

**Mr Weir:** There are no direct plans to repeat them at the moment. However, I think that there is a wider issue with outreach from the Assembly, and I think that it is important that we get both community understanding of what happens in the Assembly and community buy-in. We have to look at how we promote it in the most cost-effective way, and there are a range of ways that that can be done. For example, the recent revamping of the Assembly website to try to make it a lot more user-friendly and much more of an educational tool is one area where that has been done and should be embraced. All options will ultimately be considered, but, obviously, in tighter financial circumstances, we may be in the position where we can do fewer things than we would like to, in an ideal world.

**Mr Allister:** Does the Commission have any plans to restore some of the works of art and artefacts that are shamefully stashed away in storage? Is there any prospect of them seeing the light of day, and, particularly in this jubilee year, will the portrait of Her Majesty be restored to the Building? That would be a most fitting tribute in the year that we are in.

**Mr Weir:** Obviously, we will be looking at whatever methods we can to create a welcoming environment for everyone in Northern Ireland.

One of the aims must be, obviously not simply from a Commission point of view, looking after the Members and the direct services to the Assembly Members themselves, but also looking at the ways they interact with the public and help attract people into the Building. Therefore, what we put on display will obviously be an issue that the Assembly Commission will deal with.

I do not think that there is any attempt to hide away any artefacts in that regard. Obviously, one of the issues that we will face in the Commission as we move forward will be to consider the best way that we can have displays in the Assembly that maximise the number of people that we are getting through the doors. The message needs to go out to everyone in Northern Ireland that this is somewhere to visit and somewhere that everyone should come to see in action. Public displays can play a useful part in that.

**Deputy Speaker:** Questions 9 and 10 have been withdrawn and will be answered in writing.

## Parliament Buildings: Videoconferencing

2. **Mr F McCann** asked the Assembly Commission what videoconferencing facilities are available in Parliament Buildings. (AQO 1679/11-15)

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Videoconferencing facilities are currently available in Room 30, which is one of the Committee Rooms, and Room 54, which is an Assembly Education Service Room. The videoconferencing unit was installed in Room 30 in February 2010 and, in Room 54, it was established in October 2010. The videoconferencing facility is only available in Room 30 if a television screen has been requested for use, as a permanent television has not been installed in that Room. It might be of interest to the Member that no records have been kept on the use of the videoconferencing in Room 30; however, it has been used by at least two Committees since its installation.

**Mr F McCann:** I thank the Member for the information. Can he tell me whether videoconferencing facilities are available to individual Members?

**Mr McElduff:** I thank Mr McCann for his question. Videoconferencing facilities are available to individual Members, and, in some cases, have been booked by party administrations for their use by contacting the Education Service. The key point is that you should contact the Education Service directly. That is not a bad idea if you want to organise a videoconference with a community or voluntary group in your constituency. That is the type of thing that it is there for.

**Mr Campbell:** The Member has confirmed the availability of videoconferencing facilities. Given the austere times that we are in at the moment, everyone is looking to initiate cost-saving measures. Does this mean that Ministers will be able to avail themselves of videoconferencing, for example, if they wanted to liaise with their counterparts in the Irish Republic?

**Mr McElduff:** You are keeping well yourself, Gregory? *[Laughter.]*

The same argument could be applied on an east-west basis, but I think there might be a churlishness in the question. Videoconferencing facilities are available to individual Members. The Assembly Commission essentially serves Members, as opposed to the Executive. However, I am sure that, if Ministers seek use of this facility, it will be granted to them. I have no doubt about that.

**Mrs Dobson:** When will adequate Wi-Fi facilities be available in Parliament Buildings?

**Mr McElduff:** If the Member does not mind, I will address that in my answer to a later question that relates to the upgrade of ICT equipment.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Question 3 has been withdrawn.

## Parliament Buildings: Fairtrade Food and Beverages

4. **Mr Brady** asked the Assembly Commission what percentage of food and beverages sold in Parliament Buildings is of Fairtrade origin. (AQO 1681/11-15)

**Mr P Ramsey:** I thank the Member for the question. Since 2007, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and its current catering contractor have been supporting Fairtrade through a range of marketing products and incentives within Parliament Buildings catering outlets. Indeed, during that time, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission has also participated in Fairtrade Fortnight, which was promoted mainly by Members and Building users through a postmaster as well as promotional table talkers in all catering outlets, and in meeting, function and Committee Rooms.

The most recent Fairtrade Fortnight was held from 27 February to 11 March 2012. The latest percentage of Fairtrade food and beverages sold in all Parliament Buildings outlets is 13.6%.

**Mr Brady:** I thank the Member for his answer. Are there any plans to increase the number of Fairtrade products sold in Parliament Buildings?

**Mr P Ramsey:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. An extension of the range of Fairtrade products is always open for review and renewal, and the Commission endeavours to do that. A number of products are available in 2012 that were not previously available. A range of chocolate is available in the shops, including chocolate raisins and Buttons. I am not sure whether the Member wants me to name them all, but I will.

**Mr F McCann:** I thought you were off them all, Pat.

**Mr P Ramsey:** I am, but somebody else can be tempted by them. There are butterscotch and mini-muffin selections, KitKats and various other products.

## Parliament Buildings: Visitors

5. **Mr Wells** asked the Assembly Commission whether it has undertaken any assessment of the impact of the increasing number of visitors on the fabric of Parliament Buildings. (AQO 1682/11-15)

**Mr P Ramsey:** I thank the Member for his question. The Assembly Commission has not carried out any formal assessment of the impact of the increasing number of visitors on the fabric of Parliament Buildings. However, the Member can be assured that the building services branch in the facilities directorate regularly monitors the condition of the building and carries out a wide range of planned and reactive maintenance work to ensure that the heritage of the building is protected.

**Mr Wells:** As the Member for Foyle knows, Parliament Buildings is a listed building, and, from my experience with the National Trust, it should be treated with considerable care. We certainly should not put a ghastly computer terminal in the Great Hall, as is the case at the moment. What steps are being taken to monitor the extent of damage as a result of the welcome but hugely increased number of people visiting the property, particularly damage to the floor of the Great Hall, which is clearly beginning to show the results of much use over the past 14 years?

**Mr P Ramsey:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. In 2009, there were 59,200 visitors to the Building. In 2010, we had 70,318 visitors. Last year, with the six-week period of the elections, we had almost 70,000 visitors, so the numbers are gradually increasing. However, the Member can honestly be assured that we have specialist

teams to care for the fabric of the building. The building services branch has suitably and adequately qualified staff who have years of experience dealing with the maintenance of historical buildings.

The Member made a point about the computer terminal. If there are genuine concerns about the fabric of the floor, I will take them up with the facilities directorate and senior officers.

**Mr Elliott:** Does Mr Ramsey agree, given the last question, that this is a public building that should be open to the public to use its facilities? Assembly Members should welcome those who wish to use the Building and its facilities, irrespective of the wear and tear.

**Mr P Ramsey:** That is a valid point. Earlier, a Member asked a question about the outreach work involving roadshows and other events. The Education Service operates a successful programme to get primary and post-primary schoolchildren to visit Parliament Buildings. It is important that they have access to it and to see that it is a working environment at, for example, Question Time. There are not many people in the Public Gallery now, but a number of schools were here this morning. I agree with the Member that we need to increase those numbers and make Parliament Buildings fresh and open to everyone.

### Parliament Buildings: Agrifood

6. **Mr Molloy** asked the Assembly Commission to outline how it promotes the agrifood sector in Parliament Buildings. (AQO 1683/11-15)

**Mr P Ramsey:** I thank the Member for his question. As part of the current support services contract, the Northern Ireland Assembly made its commitment to using local food produce clear, when it stated in the specification of the contract that:

*"The use of local produce should be considerable."*

The current catering contractor endeavours to purchase produce from local sources when possible and is committed to providing the Assembly with products sourced from Northern Ireland. The contractor has given the Assembly an assurance that it will support local farming, and that is audited by the support services office. As well as the economic and environmental benefits of buying locally sourced foods, the contractor takes an active part in supporting the local farming industry.

The Member will be interested to note that 100% of the fresh beef is sourced within Northern Ireland, as is up to 80% of the fresh seasonal produce. In addition, a number of local farmers supply fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and fish to nominated distributors. The root and green vegetables and potatoes are all Northern Ireland sourced. In the fresh meat range, 100% of the poultry, 100% of the beef, 100% of the pork and approximately 50% of the lamb is UK and Northern Ireland sourced. Furthermore, all dairy and bread products are from local producers.

### 3.15 pm

**Mr Molloy:** I thank Mr Ramsey for his reply. It is very good that so much local produce is being used in the Assembly. Is there an opportunity to ensure the promotion of local

produce as well through displays? I was in Brussels recently, and there was a great display in the Executive's office of Comber potatoes, Bramley apples and Lough Neagh eels. Would there be an opportunity to have the same type of promotional display of local produce in the Chamber or the Great Hall?

**Mr P Ramsey:** I thank the Member for his question. That is a reasonable request, and it is something that the Commission would look at favourably to showcase local produce, such as that identified by the Member. I will take forward that initiative for him.

**Mr McCarthy:** I thank the Member for the information he has given. I was slightly disappointed that fish has not been mentioned. I come from the premier resort that provides fish such as Portavogie prawns. Comber spuds have been mentioned, but is Glastry ice cream, for instance, on your menu, Mr Commissioner?

**Mr P Ramsey:** I thank the Member for the question. It is obviously on your dinner plate on a Sunday. [Laughter.] We do source local fish; I can assure the Member of that. At all the catering venues in Parliament Buildings, the pork, fish, beef, lamb and poultry are all bought from Northern Ireland sources.

**Mr Swann:** I will put in an advert for Bushmills whiskey before I ask my question. What plans are there to promote local enterprise and the creative industries in the Assembly shop?

**Mr P Ramsey:** It is always challenging to be at the forefront of promoting local industry and enterprise. It is a matter that is always challenging for us in such difficult times. If the Member has any suggestions on the way forward or is aware of companies that could avail themselves of such promotion, he should come forward, and maybe we could have a conversation with senior officers.

**Mr G Robinson:** Can the canteen in the Building serve as much low fat food as possible to comply with health considerations?

**Mr P Ramsey:** I agree with the Member. We all have to be very clear about healthy eating. For a number of months, a number of Members participated in a diet, and some of them lost considerable weight.

The Assembly made its commitment to healthy eating clear when it stated that the catering contractor should provide healthy eating and encourage a reduction in salt, sugar and fats and an increase in foods high in dietary fibre. Compass/Eurest has a full commitment to healthy eating to ensure a good work/life balance. For example, Compass/Eurest has implemented a Balanced Choices programme to ensure that users can make sound nutritional choices depending on their own dietary control. However, the Member can be assured that, like any other organisation, the Assembly Commission will be challenging and bringing forward, along with the contractor, as much healthy living as possible when it comes to the food variety in the establishment.

### Constituency Offices: IT Provision

7. **Mr Byrne** asked the Assembly Commission what plans there are to upgrade IT provision in constituency offices. (AQO 1684/11-15)

**Mr McElduff:** I thank Mr Byrne for his question. The current ICT equipment was purchased in 2007 and was expected to have a useful lifespan of four years. In 2011, in light of economic circumstances, the Assembly Commission extended the life of the equipment to six years. A project to determine replacement ICT needs and provision will begin next year and be implemented in the 2013-14 financial year.

A multifunctional printer is also part of the constituency allocation, and that tends to be where the greatest problems are. Due to increasing failure rates with those devices, a printer replacement programme is being brought forward; it is planned for later in 2012. In addition, a procurement exercise is ongoing to update the broadband internet services provided to constituency offices. In respect of computer software, the Windows operating system and the suite of Microsoft Office programmes were upgraded recently to Windows 7 and Office 2010.

To respond to Mrs Dobson's question: the Commission is looking at ways of improving Wi-Fi access in the Building. The director leading that exercise is Gareth McGrath. The Commission wants to acknowledge that there is a real issue there.

**Mr Byrne:** I thank Mr McElduff for his comprehensive answer. Does he recognise that, although the current printers are multifunctional, they are also very costly to maintain? Is it the Commission's intention for us to have less complicated printers that might cost less to run?

**Mr McElduff:** I thank Mr Byrne for his supplementary. This is one of the reasons why we are ensuring that the printer replacement project is prioritised and does not have to wait until a later date. A review of existing equipment effectiveness was undertaken by the IS Office in late 2011. It identified the main pressures in the whole equipment fleet as being on the printer side of things, particularly those allocated to MLA constituency offices.

The number of printers being reported as faulty is increasing by the week, and there are very few spare printers available as replacements. That puts an urgency on this aspect of the project. As the printers are more than four years old, they are out of warranty. The IS Office has had difficulty finding suppliers who are willing to provide extended support and maintenance. That is why this aspect of the project has been brought forward from 2013 to 2012.

**Mr B McCrea:** Some Members may have a multifunctional printer, but I have a printer that has no functionality at all. Somebody's head will roll if we do not get that printer fixed. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. Come to your question, please.

**Mr B McCrea:** I ask Mr McElduff, that well known expert on matters scientific, whether he advocates the use of iPads or similar instruments. Why is the Assembly the last to adopt this technology when other councils throughout Northern Ireland have them already?

**Mr McElduff:** I point out that this is a regional Assembly and not another council. Understand that.

One of the things under consideration is the provision of tablet devices to Members. Keep taking the tablets. *[Laughter.]*

It might be useful for me to spell out what additional ICT equipment will be provided for constituency offices, for example.

**Lord Morrow:** Will they increase the dose?

**Mr McElduff:** Aye. *[Laughter.]*

The Assembly Commission determines the allocation of computer equipment and software to all Members during their term of office. Under the current arrangements, Members are entitled to four computers in total: one desktop PC in Parliament Buildings; one desktop PC in the constituency office; and up to two others, which can be either laptops or desktops and are generally used in constituency offices. In light of the outcome of the electronic Committee packs pilot project, the IS Office may also consider the provision of tablet devices to Members. Each Member is also entitled to one broadband line service.

The Member mentioned my expertise in scientific matters. There is an ongoing attempt by the Member to get me to join the all-party group on science.

**Mr Campbell:** The Member spoke about printer cartridges. Is he ensuring that the Commission is keeping under wraps their cost? In the Irish Republic, some other members of Sinn Féin were exceptionally excessive in their use of printer cartridges in the Dáil.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** The Member may wish to confine his answer to the region that we are responsible for.

**Mr McElduff:** I have noted what the Member said. *[Laughter.]*

## Young Artists

8. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Assembly Commission to outline its efforts to showcase and promote young artistic talent through events and receptions. *(AQO 1685/11-15)*

**Mr Cree:** The Commission is constantly looking at ways to engage with the community. Thousands of young people come to Parliament Buildings every year through the Education Service programme, primarily in school groups. There is an onus on Members to encourage groups to visit Parliament Buildings, and the majority of functions and many tours in Parliament Buildings are directly sponsored by Members. A number of events and receptions that have been sponsored by Members have showcased the talents of young people, whether for artistic or other endeavours. The Commission will be pleased to consider any suggestions that are put before it to encourage young people's artistic talent.

The Speaker's art competition for primary schools has just closed. Members may recall the launch of the competition, when young people came and painted in the Great Hall. The themes of the competition were "Titanic" and "My World". Judging has just finished, with winners from each of the education and library boards. Presentations will be made on 30 March, and the winning pictures will be exhibited in Parliament Buildings.

**Mr Sheehan:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an bhall as an fhreagra sin. In my constituency of West Belfast, there are a number of traditional schools of music, most notably the Andersonstown school of traditional music and Loch Lao school of traditional music. Can any effort be made to bring

those traditional music schools to Parliament Buildings to showcase their talents?

**Mr Cree:** I thank the Member for his supplementary question. The simple answer is yes. The Speaker has encouraged and invited many such groups, and it is open to the Member to invite them himself. Recently, on Commonwealth Day, we had an intercultural evening, which was excellent. There were many groups, from far-out Asia to Northern Ireland. Therefore, I do not see any difficulty in organising that. The Member can take that up, and he will get support from the Commission.

**Mrs McKeivitt:** Will the Commission consider sponsoring an annual event in Parliament Buildings to showcase the best of our artistic talent as part of the outreach programme?

**Mr Cree:** That is something that the Commission will consider. As the Member probably knows, through the Speaker's art advisory group, under the chairmanship of the Principal Deputy Speaker, Mr Francie Molloy, there have been a number of exhibitions in the Great Hall. Those have been pilot exhibitions, and they have been very successful. Any exhibitions policy will be considered by the Commission, and we will be pleased to take that forward on a firmer basis in the future.

**Mr Humphrey:** I declare an interest as a member of the Scout Association. Will the Commission consider working with state youth providers — namely, the Boys' Brigade, the Girls' Brigade, the Scouts and the Girl Guides — and include those organisations? There are tens of thousands of members across Northern Ireland working weekly with committed leaders, and they are often forgotten in this society and in this place.

**Mr Cree:** I identify with the Member, but he has the answer at his fingertips. I am quite sure that he can organise that. If he wants someone to co-sponsor him, I will be pleased to do so. However, youth organisations are very important, and I would like to see more of them through here because, after all, it is their Parliament Buildings.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Questions 9 and 10 have been withdrawn.

Mr McCartney is not in his place, Ms McCann is not in her place and Alex Maskey is not in his place.

**3.30 pm**

### Assembly: Art and Artefacts

14. **Mr Allister** asked the Assembly Commission whether it will arrange an exhibition in Parliament Buildings of all the items of art and artefacts that belong to the Assembly and which are currently in storage or on loan. (AQO 1691/11-15)

**Mr Weir:** This is an unexpected bonus for the Member.

The Assembly Commission has not, to date, considered holding an exhibition of the items of art and artefacts that belong to the Assembly. However, the Commission will hold a special meeting in April to look at the broader issue of good relations. Matters relating to what is displayed in the Building may well be among the items to be discussed as part of that agenda.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Sadly, there is not time for a supplementary question. [Laughter.] Members should take their ease for a minute or two while we make changes at the Table.

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

## Executive Committee Business

### Pensions Bill: Consideration Stage

Debate resumed on amendment Nos 5 and 6, which amendments were:

No 5: In clause 1, page 2, line 17, at end insert —

*'(8) This section shall be disregarded for the purposes of determining entitlement to Winter Fuel Payment in accordance with the Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000.'* — [Mr A Maskey]

No 6: New Clause, after clause 1 insert —

**'Duty to report on the impact of health inequalities and occupation on the cost of pension provision for various occupational sectors of the population**

*1A. The Department for Social Department shall, within one year of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent, lay a report before the Assembly on the differences in the cost of pension provision for various occupational sectors of the population arising from health inequalities, including the impact of occupation on life expectancy.'* — [Mr A Maskey]

**Mr Easton:** Amendment No 5 refers to the increase in state pension retirement age, which is not connected in any way to the winter fuel payments currently payable to vulnerable groups in society. The Bill brings equality to the retirement age of men and women and increases the retirement age to 66 years by 2020.

Pensioners are just one of many vulnerable groups entitled to receive the winter fuel payment, but the amendment could cost the Northern Ireland Executive millions of pounds. I know that the Members opposite mean well, but can they give a clear indication of where the money would come from? In the last debate, we asked the SDLP where the money would come from, but they were not able to tell us. They referred to some policy document but could not even tell us what was in it. It would be helpful to know this.

Some 1,600 people who were born between 6 February 1954 and 5 April 1954 will, in fact, get their winter fuel payments a year earlier.

Amendment No 6 creates a new clause calling for the Department for Social Development to present a report once a year on:

*"the impact of health inequalities and occupation on the cost of pension provision for various occupational sectors of the population".*

It creates an extra layer of bureaucracy, and there would be an associated cost with that. It is not clear that it is even possible to produce such a report within a year. I suggest that it would take several years, rather than one year, to produce such a report on the Bill's impact on health inequalities.

**Mr Copeland:** I welcome the opportunity to speak on the legislation.

The first amendment is very close to my views and is worth making. However, I must place a caveat on that, which is the potential cost associated with it, referred to by Mr Easton. Again, I will wait until the Minister has answered.

I also seek guidance from the Minister on whether strict cash payments are always the best way of approaching fuel poverty. I know of cases in the past when, although the actions were well intentioned, they led to more than one payment going to the same house. Presumably, you can, in many respects, heat two or three people as effectively as you can heat one. Again, we are back to what the cost of the first of the two amendments would be. I guess, in some ways, that it may not be a simple argument about breaching parity, because I do not think that this would be a breach of parity. Albeit that it would go above and beyond parity, it would still have an associated cost and, in some ways, create the same difficulty.

I am curious about the Minister's assessment of the actions that have been taken thus far to tackle fuel poverty. I welcome the event held by the Committee for Social Development, in which we all participated. That really brought the issue to the forefront, and, in fairness, the Minister did react. He brought forward a raft of measures, including double glazing. I seek an assessment of whether those measures have, at this stage, gone any distance towards achieving the goal of reducing, if not eliminating, fuel poverty.

On the first amendment, for us it is largely a question of whether it breaches parity. Does it go beyond parity? Does it test parity beyond the sensible bounds that we try to adhere to? What will the cost be? And the critical thing is this: what else might have to be given up to fund this, should it be taken up?

The last amendment is one that the Ulster Unionist Party is minded to support. It has often been said in the Department for Social Development that the journey from Sandy Row to Finaghy will cost you eight years of your life. There is something wrong in life expectancy, like educational achievement, being dictated at the date of a child's birth by the postcode of its birth. We can never make society level and regular for everyone. We can never completely smooth out the differences in the lifestyle choices that people adopt. However, we need to be seen to at least make the effort to establish how those differences arise and how they can be addressed.

I have said that my constituency, which I am honoured and privileged to represent, has, side by side, some of the wealthiest and some of the poorest wards in the Province. It was formerly an industrial behemoth, with two of the largest shipyards in the world — both in Ballymacarrett in east Belfast — the largest aircraft factory and the largest ropeworks, all of which have gone. Work needs to be done to redress the damnable fact that to travel eight miles from Belfast city centre to the outskirts of the city costs a year of life expectancy for each of those miles.

As I said, we await comment from the Minister regarding the first amendment, but we are minded to accept the second.

**Mr McGlone:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Amendment No 5 is very welcome. Indeed, the SDLP continues to prioritise the elimination of fuel poverty in the North. The amendment would protect those who will face a delay in their pension on losing out on their winter fuel payment. It is embarrassing that the Pensions Bill should suggest that our elderly accept a delay in receiving the winter fuel payment in line with the increase in pension age. It is notable that many of our elderly already struggle to stretch what is, in some cases, the meagre amount of money that they get. Given the increase in the pension age and the delay that that could cause, many will simply be plunged further into poverty, where paying for fuel will not be an option.

I commend the Members who tabled the amendment, one that the SDLP has tirelessly advocated at every opportunity. That has been most evident in the Social Development Committee. I particularly commend our spokesperson, Mark Durkan, for his role in that.

Given that the elimination of fuel poverty is a priority for our party, for the Assembly and, importantly, for the Executive, as committed to in the Programme for Government, it would certainly be a contradiction for the Minister or the Executive to force more hardship on the largest societal group currently living in fuel poverty in this region. Therefore, I support the amendment.

**Mr McCarthy:** I will be brief. Given that we have significantly less competition in the utilities market here, fuel costs are traditionally a lot higher. Therefore, we have a higher proportion of over-65s living in fuel poverty. One third of elderly clients here have to make a choice between heating and eating. Given the huge percentage increase in fuel prices since 2003, with prices looking likely to continue to rise for some time due to the investment required to replace an ageing infrastructure and the impact of high oil prices, we support the amendment. However, although winter fuel payments are of significant benefit to older people, they do not provide a long-term solution to fuel poverty. We believe that tackling energy efficiency in homes should be a key priority for the long term.

**Mr F McCann:** You mentioned the long-term strategy for fuel poverty. Do you not agree that the present Chair of the Committee for Social Development led the way by pulling together all the Departments and all the people and stakeholders who were involved in trying to work out the strategy that you are talking about?

**Mr McCarthy:** As this is the last plenary sitting before we go off on our well-earned break, I will not disagree with the Member: I congratulate the Chairperson.

I support the amendment.

**Mr Weir:** Despite the fact that this is our last day before the Easter recess, I will not quite join in the bonhomie and equanimity of the Member who spoke previously.

We oppose amendment Nos 5 and 6. Amendment No 5 is of greatest substance. We have already had the debate this morning about the equalisation of the pension age and the subsequent proposed rises in the state pension age. The winter fuel payment has, historically, been linked to the age at which a person becomes a pensioner; that is, when they are entitled to claim a state pension. For a number of years,

that discriminated against men, with women qualifying at 60 and men at 65. That resulted in a challenge to the European Court of Justice under equality legislation, which, ironically, is the same legislation that we have to comply with for the equalisation of the pension age. Both men and women were then given the winter fuel payment at the lower pension age of 60. In my view, the winter fuel payment has always been and should always be a pensioner benefit. If the state pension age rises, it is only right that an individual's access to pensioner benefits rises also. There is a clear linkage there.

There is no evidence that the amount of money that men or women spend on fuel in their home rises dramatically on their sixtieth birthday. It has tended to be the fact for women that, as their income falls, they move on to pensions from a working income, which then raises the percentage that has to be spent on fuel. With women working to 65 or 66, that drop in income is subsequently delayed, and, therefore, it is right and just that the help that the winter fuel payment provides is targeted at those who most need it: those who are on pensions. The winter fuel payment has always been linked to the state pension age. That linkage should not change simply because that age is rising.

Already, some pensioners are not able to receive the winter fuel payment at 60. I know of an incident where a man turned 60 on 9 December 2010 but was unable to claim the winter fuel payment until winter 2011. There will always be a cut-off point. Maintaining the link to the state pension age is the best way to maintain that cut-off. The need to protect the elderly has been mentioned, and we all share that view. To turn to someone who is 60 — there are Members in the Chamber who are 60 or are rapidly approaching 60 — and consider them as elderly in today's society is —

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

**Mr Weir:** Yes, I will give way.

**Mr McGlone:** We are not seeking to get into the age argument; we are seeking a fuel payment for people who are vulnerable. The vulnerability of people who have reached pension age is well established. However, I want to make one point. We could have a situation where someone may be eligible for a fuel payment one year and yet, through a quirk of the legislation, may not be eligible the subsequent year. That is a concern I have with the legislation. In other words, their entitlement is established already, but the following year they may be disentitled.

**Mr Weir:** I take the Member's point. However, if we are looking at the issue of vulnerability, at the moment this is an age-related situation and it has been linked in with the pension age. The reality is that there are some very elderly people who are not in any way vulnerable, yet they will receive the payment. Linking it to pension age seems to be a fairly sensible way to do it. We have to accept reality.

### 3.45 pm

There is also the practical reality of cost. If we were to break the link with pension age — I look forward to confirmation on this from the Minister later — the impact of this amendment alone would cost the Northern Ireland Executive around £30 million. Any money spent is an opportunity cost elsewhere. With the best will in the world, the money would have to come out of other budgets. Would it come out of the hard-pressed health budget, education or a range

of other things? This is a revenue budget; it would not be hit in capital terms. It would affect health, education or a range of those other issues. There is no way around that. If you spend £30 million of your block grant in one area, you cannot spend it elsewhere, and that would have severe consequences for a lot of people. We believe that the Bill that is going through, if used as a base to determine the pension age, would be very defensible on that basis. Consequently, although I am sure this is a well-intentioned amendment, it is, I believe, ill thought-through and will be extremely costly to the Executive and a range of other services. Dire consequences would arise from it.

I briefly turn to amendment No 6, which proposes a new clause. To be fair, I have a little more sympathy for the intentions of this amendment, but, again, I think it is slightly ill judged. It is right to have monitoring of and reporting on the situation, but I do not think that the amendment has been particularly well drafted. If we do a report within one year, we may find that there is very little data to base judgements on. A year is far too short a period in which to look at the long-term implications, and, in one year's time, we could simply end up with a report that absorbs the time and energy of government officials to no purposeful effect. Although I understand the sympathy that various parts of the House have shown for the amendment, we have to think of the consequences of our actions. If we simply produce a report for the sake of it, it will not do any good. If we produce a report that leads to proper monitoring of the situation, that is a different matter, but I do not believe that the time frames that have been put forward are in any way long enough to provide that level of judgement.

There are long-standing systemic issues, as Mr Copeland mentioned. The differences between some of our poorer areas and our more affluent areas have a major impact, but this will not be determined on a snapshot. Mr Copeland referred to the situation in East Belfast, and I think all of us can pick out similar situations in our own constituency. We know of great disparities in our society between more affluent areas and those that are poorer.

**Mr Copeland:** Do you agree that the basic tenet behind the amendment is quite sound? If we can agree on that and accept that a year is not a sufficient or appropriate length of time to tie ourselves to at this stage, could we perhaps return to it at Further Consideration Stage with a timescale that is doable?

**Mr Weir:** The sensible route, therefore, would be for the House to reject the amendment today. If it is rejected today, there is an opportunity for something of a slightly different nature to be brought back at Further Consideration Stage. I have no doubt that those who tabled the amendments were well intentioned, but, to use the old expression, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Although I do not expect that this will quite take us down that route, it is certainly not something that I think will be of benefit to the legislation. It needs to be looked at, and, if the House does not accept it today, the Department could seek a better formula for a more meaningful way of monitoring. There is no point in saying that we can produce a glossy report in a year's time —

**Mr A Maskey:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Weir:** I will give way in a second.

There is no point in saying that we can produce a glossy report in a year's time if the data is not substantial in nature and we cannot draw proper conclusions from it.

**Mr A Maskey:** I thank the Member for giving way and for giving particular attention to this amendment and accepting the bona fides of it. We suggested the report could be done within a year because we are not looking for a long-term exercise; we are looking for a collation of data that is currently in existence. We do not think it is at all difficult to produce such a report within a year. However, that can be tweaked in due course. I advocate that the Assembly adopts the amendment, which can be tweaked, if needs be, at Further Consideration Stage, after further discussions with the Department.

**Mr Weir:** I suggest that the amendment is either withdrawn or, indeed, not moved at this stage. I would have thought that we could reach consensus on something that provides meaningful analysis. It is not just about collecting current data; it is about looking at the impact in a wider context and at where we are going with all of this. Simply producing something in a year's time will not produce something meaningful. If that amendment is not accepted today, something meaningful could be tabled at Further Consideration Stage around which the whole House could unite.

Obviously, I have strong reservations about amendment No 5 because of the impact that it would have on the Northern Ireland block grant. Due to practicalities, I oppose amendment No 6. I urge the House to oppose both amendments.

**Mr Brady:** I rise to support amendment Nos 5 and 6. In deference to the previous speaker, I will try to avoid any bonhomie.

As my colleague Alex Maskey said, amendment No 5 is a straightforward amendment that would protect the older people who are already identified as the most vulnerable to fuel poverty and whose status as pensioners will be delayed by changes to the state pension age. Already, 23% of pensioners live in poverty, a figure that is much higher than that for anywhere else in Britain. The increase in the pension age will mean that many of our most vulnerable older people will, because of ill health or the rigorous demands of the labour market, be left dependent on less generous unemployment benefit, when, prior to the changes, they would have been entitled, as pensioners, to greater support.

It is reasonable to suppose that those who are identified as vulnerable to fuel poverty and are in receipt of the more generous state pension will continue to be in fuel poverty when they are reclassified as unemployed and are in receipt of a less generous benefit. We should not forget that, as has already been mentioned, in the past year, 756 older people in our community died from cold-related illnesses. Many of them could not afford to heat their house. That is an appalling statistic, and we should not forget it.

I will move on to amendment No 6. The Bill is very much built on the notion that increasing the pension age is reasonable because a rise in average life expectancy means that we all live longer. Mr Copeland mentioned that he had come into contact with three children in his constituency, at least one of whom could expect to live to 100 years old. I must say that it is gratifying to know that, if you come into contact with Mr Copeland, it can put years on you. *[Laughter.]* That is possibly a different matter.

There is a blatant misrepresentation of the reality that lies behind the statistics. It ignores persistent health inequalities that prevail in certain disadvantaged groups. Conditions here in the North differ significantly from those in Britain, particularly in the wealthier, more privileged south of England, where experience continues to dominate social policy proposals and advances that are applicable everywhere. One of the most glaring anomalies has to be life expectancy. The greatest improvement in life expectancy is in the south of England, particularly in London, with some of the wealthiest boroughs — Kensington and Chelsea — enjoying the greatest improvement in average life expectancy, even if they have not got the best football teams. The North of Ireland is among the areas that suffer the worst average life expectancy. A recent report that was highlighted in the 'Belfast Telegraph' revealed that men who live in Belfast city centre can expect to die 10 years earlier than those who live in south Belfast. The example was given that, if you get on the bus in Donegall Square and go to Finaghy, you will live longer. Obviously, after having read that report, a lot of people are moving to Finaghy. Women who live in the city centre can also expect to die six years earlier.

Those are shocking levels of health inequality between regions and even within relatively small geographical areas. They expose the inadequacy of using an average rise in life expectancy to determine policy. Recent statistics have revealed that the gap between the average life expectancy of the rich and the poor is widening, not narrowing. By the same token, those who are most likely to enjoy the greatest longevity are less prone to suffer the chronic ageing conditions associated with more disadvantaged groups.

The operation of parity continues to thwart the Assembly's ability to craft social policy to properly address the needs of people who actually live here. British Tories are keen to promote regional differences when it comes to proposing cuts but are less keen to recognise such differentials when it comes to addressing greater need. Conducting a study and laying its findings before the Assembly is a small undertaking, but it is not insignificant. If conducted with due diligence, it would reveal the reality of life expectancy and the patterns of health inequality in the North, providing vital information on which the Assembly could craft its own social policy intervention. I urge the Assembly to support the amendments. It is interesting to note from all we heard here today that, instead of celebrating the fact that people live longer, we are talking about penalising them.

**Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):**

I listened carefully to the arguments put forward in support of the amendments. I preface my remarks with a little quotation. I am delighted that Mr Durkan, who was missing from the Chamber a little earlier, has returned. The quotation for him is this:

*"It is essential that the Pensions Bill should be subject to accelerated passage. It is not something that I do lightly. There are various reasons for it; all of this is underpinned by the principle of parity, so there is little option in this."*  
— *[Official Report, Bound Volume 25, pCS11, cols 1-2].*

That statement was made by one Margaret Ritchie back in 2007, when she was the Minister for Social Development. Just note those words. It is an interesting quotation that I hope the Member finds very informative.



The proposed amendment to clause 1 in respect of the winter fuel payment disregards changes to the timetable for increasing state pension age for the purposes of entitlement to the winter fuel payment. If that amendment were accepted, the existing timetable for increasing the state pension age would continue to apply. As a result, the winter fuel payment would be payable to men and women under state pension age, and that position would continue until winter 2025-26.

Originally, when the winter fuel payment was introduced, it was payable at pension age — 65 for a man and 60 for a woman. So, from its very inception, it was clearly a pensioner benefit. However, following a judgment of the European Court, the age of entitlement had to be made the same for men and women. One way of doing that would have been to increase the age of entitlement for men and women to 65, but that would have left women of pension age with no access to a winter fuel payment for the first five years of retirement. Instead, the then Government decided to pay it to men and women from age 60 on the clear understanding that the age of entitlement would rise in line with women's state pension age. The policy intention was and remains that the winter fuel payment is a pensioner benefit. It is an integral part of a complex system of benefit provision that can be broadly divided into working age and pension age.

A failure to increase the qualifying age in line with state pension age would introduce new age inequalities for people of different working ages, without any objective policy rationale for doing so. For example, if 60 had been retained as the qualifying age for the winter fuel payment after it ceased to be women's state pension age, there would be no grounds for excluding people aged 59 or, indeed, any other age from entitlement. The continued link with the women's state pension age is consistent with the objective of targeting resources on pensioners and reflects what has always been the policy intention underpinning the winter fuel payment.

Financial modelling is difficult. Where one member of a couple has reached the qualifying age, the household receives the full award; however, where a couple have both reached the qualifying age, the amount is divided between the two. Assuming that all those affected would be entitled to the £200 maximum, it is estimated that the amendment could cost the Northern Ireland block up to £30.5 million. As I made clear when I spoke to the earlier amendments, in an ideal world, no one would want to increase the pension age, with its knock-on consequences for entitlement to the winter fuel payment.

However, we have to face the reality of the position that we are in.

#### 4.00 pm

Earlier, I spoke at length on the parity implications of the proposed amendments to clause 1. Although in this case the costs to the Northern Ireland block grant are somewhat lower at up to £30.5 million, they are, nonetheless, significant. I do not think that it is necessary for me to rehearse all the arguments and the very real dangers of agreeing to such a serious breach of parity.

When I or my Department bring forward legislation, Members quite rightly insist that we consider the equality impact of our proposals. I believe that we must also cast a similar light on the amendments. Amendment No 5 would, in effect, discriminate against people of different working

ages without any objective policy rationale for doing so. For example, if we were to accept the amendment, we would still be paying a winter fuel payment to those who are under the state pension age in the winter of 2025-26, some 14 years after the Bill had been introduced. For the reasons that I outlined, I believe that we have no option but to resist amendment No 5.

Before I turn to the second amendment in this group, I want to pick up on some of the comments that were made. On the point that Alex Maskey made, the fuel allowance payment that was provided by the Executive this year to help with fuel poverty was quite separate from the social security system. That ensured that we did not compromise the principle of parity, which is crucial. Michael Copeland raised a point about parity, and amendment No 5 is a clear breach of parity. The Member is right in that regard and I agree with him and endorse what he said. Winter fuel payments are an integral part of the package of pension benefits that includes state pensions, state pension credit, attendance allowance, etc, and that are specifically designed to support pensioners. I have dealt at length with the dangers of breaking parity, and I do not see a particular need to rehearse those again. Picking up on Patsy McGlone's point, no one who is already entitled to a winter fuel payment will lose out as a result of the Bill.

I want to make another point about winter fuel payments, and that is on the issue of fuel poverty. Fuel poverty is an important issue for the Executive and the Assembly. It has a number of causes that are built around the cost of fuel, the level of income in homes and, in particular — it is the one over which we have most control — the energy efficiency of homes. Therefore, it is important that we look at that issue for a moment.

The increase in the qualifying age for the winter fuel payment is a direct consequence of increases in the state pension age. It is important to note that, as I indicated, when one member of a couple reaches the qualifying age, households will receive the full award. In April 2011, the Department launched a new fuel poverty strategy called Warmer Healthier Homes. The strategy takes forward energy brokering and a boiler replacement scheme, and it calls for action on the price of oil imports and the development of a range of initiatives to tackle fuel poverty. A primary aim of the strategy is the targeting of available resources to those vulnerable households that are most in need of help, and older people are identified as a vulnerable group in it.

The Department also continues to fund the warm homes scheme, which offers a range of insulation and heating measures to vulnerable householders. That scheme is the Department's primary tool in tackling fuel poverty and, under it, in excess of 80,000 households have been helped with insulation and/or heating measures since it commenced in 2001. The pilot boiler replacement scheme that was launched in June last year offers a grant of up to £1,500 to householders to replace old and inefficient boilers, and £2 million has been allocated to that scheme to replace 1,330 inefficient boilers. I had the opportunity of visiting one home, and the gentlemen who lived there told me that, over a year, he had saved a complete fill of oil because he had a new boiler. Those replacements can mean major savings, particularly if the boilers are very old, and many pensioners have such boilers in their homes.

The Department is working with the Housing Executive, Kingspan Renewables and Carillion Energy Services to develop a pilot pay-as-you-go option for people who rely on oil to heat their homes. There are a range of interventions that we make in relation to fuel poverty, and it is better to make the investment in energy efficiency rather than in a single payment, because the single payment is then gone, whereas year-on-year energy efficiency house improvements, as was the case for the particular gentleman whom I mentioned, mean that families, couples or individuals can make year-on-year savings.

The second amendment in this group proposes to insert new clause 1A into the Bill. The new clause would place a duty on my Department to lay, within one year, a report:

*“on the differences in the cost of pension provision for various occupational sectors ... arising from health inequalities, including the impact of occupation on life expectancy.”*

It is not clear what the exact purpose of such a report would be. However, my Department does not currently have access to the necessary information. Obtaining it would require a major analytical project and, perhaps, new legal gateways to allow access to information held by other Departments and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Meaningful results could take several years, and the necessary work would have significant resource implications. It is difficult to see any scope for our having different pension ages in Northern Ireland, and there is a strong argument that the available resources are better directed to the ongoing work around welfare reform.

It is, however, the case that we are, on average, living longer and healthier lives than in the past, and although there are long-term differences in life expectancy between parts of the United Kingdom, life expectancy has risen in all regions. Between 2004 and 2006, and 2008 and 2010, a period of four years —

**Mr Copeland:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr McCausland:** Yes.

**Mr Copeland:** If I am following your thought processes, Minister, you are, to a degree, agreeing that the piece of work is worth doing, but saying that the time frame is somewhat constrained. Would you be minded to acquiesce when the Bill comes to Further Consideration Stage and give some indication as to the sort of time frame that may be necessary and the results that could be achieved after some further consideration?

**Mr McCausland:** I thank the Member for his intervention. Yes; a longer reporting period would be of much better statistical value, and would, hopefully, get for us a better picture. I am happy to take that suggestion that we bring the proposal back at Further Consideration Stage, with a longer reporting period than one year, as was stated in the amendment.

I will conclude with some comments on life expectancy. Over that period of four years between 2004 and 2006 and 2008 and 2010, the life expectancy for a man aged 65 in Northern Ireland rose from 16.7 years to 17.4 years. There was an increase of 0.7 years — just over six months —

**Mr F McCann:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr McCausland:** Yes.

**Mr F McCann:** I will be brief. I understand that statistics work in many ways for many different people, but there are areas in the North — Mickey used the Finaghy analogy — and areas in Belfast that do not reach those standards, where health and life expectancy are poor. When we talk about trying to deal with those issues, those are the people we are talking about. NISRA provides annual or biannual statistical data that allows us to tap into a rich source of information.

**Mr McCausland:** There are two points there. I will deal with the reference to life expectancy first. Yes, there is a variation from place to place in Northern Ireland, just as there is a variation from region to region in Great Britain. It is the same in England, Scotland and Wales; it is the case in every country that there are variations. We could get more detailed information about particular areas or the demographic profile of life expectancy.

Nevertheless, over that period of just four years, there was an increase of 0.7 years in life expectancy — average life expectancy, admittedly. That suggests that some people who might not have lived as long will live longer. They are average figures because you cannot deal with any figures other than average figures in this regard.

He made a point about the information that is available from the Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency (NISRA). Undoubtedly, there is a lot of information available from NISRA, but there are other areas of information that would make this piece of work much more informative and valuable, and it is worth taking up the proposal that we bring this back at Further Consideration Stage to see exactly what would be a reasonable timescale to get the best value out of the work. There is no point in doing it just for the sake of it. Let us ensure that whatever is done gets for us the best outcome and the best value. Projections indicate that the upward trend in the average lifespan is set to continue. Between 2010 and 2025, the number of people in Northern Ireland who are aged 65 or over is projected to increase by over 40%. To try to take into account differences in life expectancy by varying the state pension age for regions, socioeconomic groups or occupations would make the system very complex and difficult or impossible to administer.

I urge Members to reject amendment No 5 and to agree that we bring amendment No 6 back at Further Consideration Stage after further consideration has indeed been given to it. Amendment No 5, if accepted, would, clearly, breach parity and have serious funding implications. Amendment No 6, if accepted, would be resource intensive and, in its current form, the proposal would be unlikely to effect any meaningful changes or produce any really significant information. Therefore, I commend that we bring it back at Further Consideration Stage, having given it some more thought.

**Mr A Maskey:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will seek to keep this very brief, because I do not intend to rehearse all of the points and arguments that were made by a variety of Members. First, I will refocus on amendment No 5. As I said earlier, and as other Members revisited, the purpose of the amendment is to alleviate the difficulties that many of our older citizens, in particular, will suffer as a result of the increase in the pensionable age — both, for women,

from 60 to 65, and, everyone having been equalised, first to 66 and upwards to 67 and 68 in due course.

There is a clear body of compelling evidence that tells us that a number of our citizens, particularly senior citizens, are very vulnerable to fuel poverty. Therefore, there has been a requirement for this type of support in the past, and, indeed, up to now. The increasing of the pensionable age is, primarily, a cost-saving exercise by the British Government. That may well be reasonable and all the rest of it to some people, but, nevertheless, there are negative consequences to that, and this is one of the negative consequences. As I said earlier, a lot of evidence tells us that, in increasing numbers, people are suffering and will suffer as a result of this provision in the Bill. I accept that there is an argument around parity and that, of course, there will be a price tag to this.

I draw attention to the Minister's comments, and he is the lead Minister in the Executive on the question of fuel poverty. It is clear that, if a cogent and sustained fuel poverty strategy were embarked upon with a proper implementation plan and appropriate levels of investment, surely, in the longer run, we would make people less dependent on fuel poverty support, because we would have been systemically reducing the problem of fuel poverty. The Minister outlined a number of the measures that would be required to do that. If, in the time ahead, you were to invest in measures to mitigate fuel poverty, you would not necessarily eradicate the problem but you would certainly reduce it considerably, thereby making people less reliant on fuel poverty support. It is not necessarily logical at all to say that, by allowing people to receive fuel poverty payments which are not connected and directly linked to the pensionable age, you will be paying them in perpetuity, because, at any given time in the future, it is up to us to say that we have significantly tackled the problem of fuel poverty so we can discontinue the payment. I do not think that an endless pit of money would be required to be paid out.

#### 4.15 pm

I stress that the issue of parity, particularly on an issue such as this, has not been properly and robustly challenged enough in our view, and that is why we want to continue to press ahead with the amendment. There is compelling evidence to support the amendment, and we think that it is worth challenging the Government directly on that issue. That is the primary purpose behind the amendment.

I will move on to amendment No 6. I have heard Members across the Chamber, including the Minister, suggest that the Minister or his Department would be open to a discussion on this, and, if that is the case — the Minister repeated that in his closing remarks — I and my party are prepared to withdraw the amendment for today so that we can have a reasonable and rational discussion with the Department and the Minister to ensure that we have a further amendment at Further Consideration Stage. At an appropriate point, we will table a further amendment, which hopefully, we can agree on.

The essence of the amendment is to say that the upward increase in the age of eligibility for state pension is an arbitrary figure, and I have no confidence that the British Government will not continue to move the goalposts. That being said, the measures are simply to address, not so much the issue of greater longevity, but the sustainability or cost of running a pension scheme. I do not ignore the

difficulties with that, but, nevertheless, the measures do not in any way take into consideration the health profile of the population. Therefore, amendment No 6 was primarily designed to say that we hear all that the Government have been saying but none of it is linked to people's health profile and their ability to continue working at an older age. We want an amendment to be accepted and passed by the House and accepted by the Department so that we can have a proper, meaningful debate in due course on the basis of proper and up-to-date data.

The Minister has said — I appreciate him doing so and taking this on board during the debate — that we can have a discussion on an appropriate amendment that allows us to do precisely that, and, if that is the case, whatever about the time frame, we will be happy to withdraw the amendment this afternoon so that we can have that discussion and, hopefully, come back with an agreed position. Failing that, I have to say for the record that we would resubmit our amendment to the House at a later stage.

*Question put, That amendment No 5 be made.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 34; Noes 45.*

#### AYES

*Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Sheehan.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Brady and Mr F McCann.*

#### NOES

*Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T 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 B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Ms Brown and Mr Easton.*

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 45; Noes 30.*

#### AYES

*Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T 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 B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt,*

Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson,  
Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy]  
in the Chair)

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Brown and Mr Easton.

## NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady,  
Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood,  
Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann,  
Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay,  
Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness,  
Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy,  
Mr Ó hOisín, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Brady and Mr F McCann.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Amendment No 6 not moved.

Clauses 2 to 34 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

### **Schedule 1 (Equalisation of and increase in pensionable age for men and women: consequential amendments)**

Amendment No 7 not moved.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Schedules 2 to 4 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Pensions Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker. I ask Members to take their ease for a few minutes, please.

## Private Members' Business

### **Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005**

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 45 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. Two amendments have been selected. 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 want to say to the whole House that I am conscious that the motion refers to matters that have already been before the courts and on which judgement has been given. However, the Speaker cannot be expected to know what other cases of a similar nature may come before the courts in the future. I therefore caution Members to be very careful in everything that they say today to avoid the risk of prejudicing any such proceedings. I hope that that is clear.

**Ms J McCann:** I beg to move

*That this Assembly registers its concerns in relation to the quality and reliability of evidence provided by assisting offenders under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, as witnessed in the recent supergrass trial, and the subsequent undermining of confidence in the administration of justice; believes that it is essential that the criminal justice system operates in a transparent manner which respects the rights and entitlements of all citizens and engenders maximum public confidence in our policing and justice systems; and calls on the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General to use their powers to call for an immediate review of the operation of the legislation.*

Before I open the debate, I am very conscious of the English family, who were directly affected by the recent trial and, indeed, of other families who have lost loved ones and may also be affected by what is said in today's debate. I ask all Members, including myself, to be conscious of that when speaking in the debate. In the first instance, all those families are entitled to justice and truth, and some of them have been waiting a very long time to get it.

Today's debate is about highlighting the serious concerns that some of us have about justice and the delivery of justice, which is the bedrock on which any democratic society is built. There is a responsibility for the police, the prosecution service and the judiciary to deliver justice to those who need it. When it comes to delivering justice, there can be no half measures or short cuts. We must all be satisfied that those who are at the heart of the justice system are working impartially and have confidence that the criminal justice system has been transformed in the way set out by the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement.

Our party is opposed to the use of supergrass evidence. We opposed it in the 1980s and oppose it today because there are insufficient safeguards in the legislation. There is

a fear that supergrass trials will be used to cover the role of police agents and their Special Branch handlers, and public confidence in the judicial system will be diminished if it becomes clear that a cover-up is taking place in any case brought before the courts. That has also been reflected in other cases, and I want to mention briefly the murders of David Mclwaine and Andrew Robb, whose families still believe that the legislation was used to cover up and conceal the identities of those who were involved in their murders. That cannot work, and it will corrupt and contaminate the new dispensation in policing and justice to which we have all signed up and to which we all aspire.

Justice has to be the product of careful, painstaking, deliberate and probing investigation by the appropriate agencies: the police, the prosecution service and the judiciary. All those agencies exist on a lifeline of support from the public, which arises from a contract of obligation and an affirmation of approval — an endorsement between the people and the justice system.

The use of supergrass testimony fatally undermines the pursuit and delivery of justice, as it depends and revolves around people looking out for themselves. In this recent case, it was said by the trial judge, and consequently by others, that the assisting witnesses were of bad character and yet were deemed as witnesses of truth for the prosecution. The fact is that their evidence centres on their immunity from sentencing and not some road to Damascus conversion whereby their consciences made them come forward. That involves a deal for a shorter time in prison, which leads people to lie. Those lies are then carried by the police and passed on to the prosecution service, which then passes them on to a judge, thus undermining any kind of public confidence in the whole judicial process.

That was very obvious during the 1980s, when hundreds of people were put in prison on the basis of supergrass testimony. What was not so obvious then was where the lie began, how directly involved the police and the prosecution service were, and how much the judge knew about the origins and authors of the lie. Those questions were never satisfactorily answered. The likelihood is that we will never be able to get them answered fully. What we do know is that the police, the prosecution service and the judiciary were badly damaged in the public's mind by the use of supergrass testimony back then. My party wonders why anyone would want to bring us back to those times of controversy and public doubt about the whole justice system.

We need to look at how the system has been tainted. We also have to understand that, in the North of Ireland today, there are Diplock courts with one judge and no jury. We also have to look at that. The legislation states that there is no clear procedure to address what happens to accomplices when they knowingly tell lies. We have seen that in the past number of weeks.

Today, we ask the Minister to bring forward a review of the legislation. There is a new era that requires all agencies to reflect the change. That is especially true of the police, the Public Prosecution Service and the judiciary.

**Lord Morrow:** I am struck by the fact that the Member has talked here, on a number of occasions, about the new dispensation that we have moved into and how she is concerned lest the new dispensation become tainted.

Does the Member agree with me that there is more moving on to be done by those whom she and her party claim to represent? We have the continual running sore of the disappeared. Those people and their families are also entitled to justice. The Member may speak about this later. I may have pre-empted her, and I hope that I have not. However, I ask her to tell us, in a clear and stark manner, how she proposes to deal with that issue, which is a running sore for those families who have had to suffer so much. Will she address that issue in her comments today?

**Ms J McCann:** I say to the Member very clearly that those families are entitled to justice and truth. I have no problem saying that very clearly.

It has already been accepted, even by the Minister, that this case has dented public confidence. Therefore, I ask every Member in the Chamber to support the motion.

**Mr B McCrea:** I beg to move the amendment No 1: Leave out all after 'offenders' and insert

*'in the recent trial which used evidence under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 and the subsequent undermining of confidence in the administration of justice; recognises that assisting offenders can be a powerful tool in the fight against serious and organised crime; believes that it is essential that the criminal justice system operates in a transparent manner which respects the rights and entitlements of all citizens, protects the public against criminals and engenders maximum public confidence in our policing and justice systems; and calls on the Minister of Justice to ensure that there are positive working relationships between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service in the operation of the legislation and that adequate accountability measures are in place.'*

In proposing amendment No 1, I will detail the concerns that I have with the main motion and amendment No 2. I appeal to my colleagues in the SDLP on an issue that I tried to discuss with Alban Maginness at the Justice Committee. The issue with the main motion is the use of the word "supergrass". That is a pejorative term that brings us back to the 1980s. This is not the 1980s: we are 30 or 40 years on.

What is a society entitled to expect from a judicial system? It is that bad people go to prison. We must find whoever is responsible for the crimes that were committed. There were 25 new murder inquiries conducted. No one was found guilty of the crimes, but those people were killed. Surely we ought to get a frame of justice that tries to find some sort of satisfaction in the law for that purpose. When Members propose this as some sort of catch-all in respect of supergrass trials, it seems to me to deny the vast majority of the public the basic support and help that they should expect under the law.

Where you have serious organised criminals who use sophisticated techniques to avoid detection and prosecution, then surely if you can get evidence from one of their own — an accomplice — that evidence should be used to put those criminals behind bars if at all possible.

**5.00 pm**

Some complaints were made about this particular case as a lot of money was spent. It was certainly very high

profile, and, ultimately, there were no prosecutions. The question comes up: should the case have been brought in the first place? Well, all parties, apart from Alliance, were represented on the Policing Board, and they will be aware of the reasons for setting up the independent panel. It was a live criminal case, and there were certain areas of confidentiality that could not be explained then and which I do not choose to explain now. However, as chair of the Policing Board's Human Rights Committee, I will say that —

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

**Mr B McCrea:** I will indeed.

**Mr Craig:** I question how much information the Member can actually give on this. There were certain privileged circumstances under which some of this was discussed at the Policing Board, and I ask the Member to bear that in mind. I also ask him to bear in mind that a Member from this party vigorously opposed some of the recommendations that were made to the Policing Board.

**Mr B McCrea:** I thank the Member for his intervention. I was in the process of explaining that there are things that cannot be said because of confidentiality. Nevertheless, it is worth stating that the European legislation — specifically article 2(2) of the European Convention on Human Rights — talks about how you investigate situations where the state is accused of being involved in murder. I will say to you, if you understand the point, that the police have the legal right to take life. It is a really strange undertaking, but that is a legal right in certain circumstances. However, if they do take life, you have to have an independent inquiry.

We have talked in the past about the whole issue of independence. Mr Craig might be interested to know that when we talked about the independent panel being set up, it was not to do with this case; it was to do with the Stephen Lawrence case. In the past, there was absolute agreement that the family of those involved should be kept informed about proceedings. Therefore, there was precedent for why it was done. The Policing Board took other steps to ensure that it had oversight of what was going on, but confidentiality does not permit me to say what those steps were.

People are calling for an open and transparent process, but actually that process took place, and all parties should be aware of that. Although the Alliance Party has no members on the Policing Board, I presume that the Justice Minister and the Alliance Party will also be familiar with that.

I have to say to the people who brought this motion forward that I am surprised that they have issues with the concept of using evidence, where evidence is found to be satisfactory, to put bad people behind bars. In essence, that must be a good thing. In certain specific cases, a judge or court will look at evidence and say that it is not admissible or that they do not accept the veracity of the witnesses, or whatever. A number of cases have happened in other jurisdictions similar to this one where that has been found to be the case. However, that surely proves the point that the judicial system actually works. Even though there is a case to be made and a case to be answered, you are able to say that in a certain case, it was found to be wanting.

I will put on record what I know. In the Hansard report of evidence from the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) to the Justice Committee, Mr McGrory stated that there was some

justification for bringing the case, because, even at the halfway stage, the judge said that there was still a case to answer. That justifies the position that the PPS took.

**Mr Allister:** Is it not the case that the test for prosecution is not whether there is a prima facie case — a case to answer — but whether there is a realistic prospect of conviction, which is informed by an examination of the evidence, including the evidence's credibility? Therefore, when the director said on public radio that it was right to bring this case, because there was a prima facie case, he was not, in fact, reflecting the proper legal test, which is this: is there a realistic prospect of conviction? Had that test been applied, given the inherent and known flaws in the brothers' evidence, it is a prosecution that would perhaps not otherwise have been brought.

**Mr B McCrea:** Loath as I am to cross swords on a point of law with the Member to my right, I will quote from the Hansard report of the Committee meeting. Mr McGrory said:

*"There is a reasonable argument that the evidential test was met."*

That is what he says is his test. He continued:

*"Indeed, in his evaluation of the evidence after cross-examination by 12 QCs over a protracted period of weeks, the trial judge took the view that he could still convict and that there was a credible basis on which there could be convictions at that stage and so did not stop the case at what we call the halfway stage."*

All that I can say is that it is a point of law that goes back and forward. There is an evidential test; there is a public interest test; there is a judicial review; there is a system in place. Whatever the outcome of that, I think that the system works.

Time is pressing on, but I will say in this argument that I am not happy with a motion that tries to put all so-called supergrass trials in the same league. There is an issue with bad people —

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

**Mr B McCrea:** I am sorry, but I do not have the time. There are situations in which bad people are in organised criminal gangs, which are incredibly destructive to society. When we get evidence from people who are accomplices, it should be pursued. They should be brought before the courts of justice, and the courts will decide the appropriate way of dealing with the matter.

I come now to amendment No 2. Although I have a certain sympathy with the reason that the DUP tabled it, there are certain issues to do with the independent oversight panel, and I have explained that to DUP Members. When you look at the Stephen Lawrence arrangements and various other things, you will see that, in principle, it is right and proper that you adhere to the legislation as laid out in the Human Rights Act. I look at that and say that the DUP's amendment goes too far. The basic principle that we are arguing for here is —

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

**Mr B McCrea:** Amendment No 1 makes the best of a difficult situation, and I genuinely ask Members present to vote for amendment No 1 as the right way forward.

**Mr Givan:** I beg to move amendment No 2: Leave out all after "2005" and insert

*"in the Tommy English murder trial and the subsequent undermining of confidence in the administration of justice; believes that it is essential that the criminal justice system operates in a transparent manner which respects the rights and entitlements of all citizens and engenders maximum public confidence in our policing and justice systems; and calls on the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General to use their powers to call for an immediate review of the operational decisions taken in the aforementioned murder trial and the role of the independent oversight panel in the police investigation."*

The difficulty that we have with the motion is that it puts a question mark against the very principle of using accomplice evidence to secure a conviction, which is a principle that has been long established. Justice Gillen cited in his judgement the comments made by the court in the Blackburn case of 2007. I support those comments, and I think it beneficial to repeat them. In that case, the court said:

*"There never has been, and never will be, much enthusiasm about a process by which criminals receive lower sentences than they otherwise deserve because they have informed on or given evidence against those who participated in the same or linked crimes, or in relation to crimes in which they had no personal involvement, but about which they have provided useful information to the investigating authorities. However, like the process which provides for a reduced sentence following a guilty plea, this is a longstanding and entirely pragmatic convention. The stark reality is that without it major criminals who should be convicted and sentenced for offences of the most seriousness might, and in many cases, certainly would escape justice ... The solitary incentive to encourage co-operation is provided by a reduced sentence, and the common law, and now statute, have accepted that this is a price worth paying to achieve the overwhelming and recurring public interest that major criminals, in particular, should be caught and prosecuted to conviction."*

We support what the Ulster Unionist Party has put forward in its amendment, but we believe that our amendment goes further and addresses the very serious issue of the role that the independent oversight panel had and continues to have in the police investigation associated with Operation Stafford, which included the Tommy English murder trial, and I will elaborate on that shortly.

The need for a review of the work of the Historical Enquiries Team and the Public Prosecution Service in the case of the Tommy English murder trial is clear when you consider the judgement made by Justice Gillen in respect of the credibility of the Stewart brothers, who were relied upon to provide the key evidence in this case. He said:

*"both Stewarts in the past at least were ruthless criminals, unflinching terrorists and men of profoundly bad character conducting their lives very often in a haze of alcoholic stupor and illegal drug abuse. Their lives were chaotic and devoid of normal moral scruples. They lived in a place where powerful criminals, such as themselves, were subject to few or no rules, where the voice of civilised reason was silenced and where it was difficult for the innocent to complain. Their admissions*

*in 2008 to a plethora of criminal offences committed over a lengthy period of time presented an overpowering and piercing image of unspeakable random violence and mean spirited deceit from which decent men and women would instantly recoil and which even for the court made wincing listening. ... My concern was that despite their assertions of change and professed commitment to do the right thing, these were the same men merely wearing new suits."*

Justice Gillen also said that:

*"The supportive evidence relied on by the prosecution has fallen far short of repairing these defects"*

in the Stewart brothers' evidence.

The question that must be asked is this: why, after 330 interviews, during which the brothers also lied, was the decision made to take the case to trial? That decision resulted in a failure to secure convictions through accomplice evidence, allowed the Stewart brothers to receive a minimal sentence when they should have been given a severe sentence, cost the taxpayer millions of pounds and damaged public confidence in the administration of justice. Indeed, figures have come to light today that show that, so far, almost £6 million has been spent on this case, and that is before the fees for barristers and solicitors claimed through legal aid are added to the total cost, which could add a further £5 million to £6 million to the final bill, doubling the current amount.

An issue that needs to be resolved is the process for reviewing the sentences given to those who have turned Queen's evidence but who subsequently fail to tell the truth and who, as in this case, are found to be liars. Alarming, the Director of Public Prosecutions has admitted that the SOCPA legislation is silent on that matter, which further damages confidence as it can only give rise to the view that individuals can become assisting offenders and have a reduced sentence without any consequences if they fail to tell the truth. In cases of this nature, when the testimony that will be relied on is from individuals who, by the very fact that they are accomplices, will be of bad character — in this case, they were of profoundly bad character — a higher test must be met by the Public Prosecution Service before deciding to prosecute.

I turn to the serious questions that need to be answered with regard to the role of the independent oversight panel in the police investigation of this case and those associated with Operation Stafford. At the Justice Committee, the Minister and his officials confirmed that an independent oversight panel for the police investigation entitled Operation Stafford, which included this case, is in existence. Subsequently, in the House of Commons, the membership of the panel has been confirmed to consist of Baroness Nuala O'Loan and Richard Harvey, a London barrister. In response to a question from Ian Paisley Jnr, Mr Hugo Swire MP revealed that the panel was established in November 2010 to receive regular and comprehensive briefings on the progress of the PSNI's Operation Stafford.

My concern emanates from the fact that Operation Stafford stems from the Police Ombudsman's report on Operation Ballast, which caused huge controversy at the time of its publication in 2007. The report was rejected by the Northern Ireland Retired Police Officers' Association, which issued

a rebuttal of the statement made by the ombudsman, including a particular response to the allegation of collusion:

*"The misuse of the word 'collusion', without any legal anchorage, has led to it being used as a political catchphrase. As a result, police officers who have served their country and community with integrity and bravery have been vilified in the court of public opinion. On every single occasion where the word 'collusion' appears in the Statement, the 'finding' is entirely groundless."*

#### 5.15 pm

My suspicions have also been heightened following the BBC 'Spotlight' programme. Someone who contributed said that criminal prosecutions are needed against those who handled agents either in the police, intelligence agencies or the army. Jennifer McCann earlier alluded to the real agenda for those in the republican community; namely, attacking the Royal Ulster Constabulary, particularly those who served in Special Branch.

Given the context around Operation Stafford, which stemmed from Operation Ballast, I think it is understandable that questions about the independence of this oversight panel have been raised. We need to know its terms of reference, the process that was used to appoint members, the remit of the panel and what recommendations or observations it has made and to whom in respect of the police investigations.

**Mr A Maginness:** Thank you for giving way. You raised an issue about Operation Ballast and the oversight of this particular case. Are you saying that, had there been no oversight, you would have no problems with this case going ahead? You seem to be conflating the two issues.

**Mr Givan:** The issue of having some type of oversight of a police investigation is not unheard of; the issue, though, is the nature of its independence. Operation Ballast was penned by the Police Ombudsman who now sits on the oversight panel of the police investigation. That has rightly led to questions about the independence of that oversight panel.

**Mr A Maginness:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Givan:** Not at this point again.

The Minister of Justice stated that the formation of this panel is "unusual". The Secretary of State said in response to the creation of the panel:

*"we must be very careful to respect the independence of the police in operational matters".*

Therefore, I am calling for a full inquiry into the role of the oversight panel in order to answer the questions there are around its role and independence. In no way do I see how this independent panel is necessary to comply with some article of human rights legislation, as Mr McCrea seemed to suggest. I do not see how my and the party's amendment would in any way be a particular problem. What we are asking for is an inquiry into its role. We need to have confidence that Operation Stafford is being conducted properly, and there are question marks over the independent oversight of that particular body. That is why this party proposed the amendment, which we will support at the vote.

**Mr Eastwood:** I welcome the motion. My party will offer its full support. Supergrass trials are highly sensitive, as we

know, given their history in Ireland. It is worth noting that this history extends beyond the memory and experience of our recent Troubles here in the North. This Assembly cannot hope to properly and fully comment on supergrass trials without grasping this broader history; a history that acted to erode so much confidence in certain judicial processes and the state's advocacy of them.

This is part of the wider issue of our reformed policing and judicial institutions. Given the findings of the recent 'Peace Monitoring Report', one of which was that the policing deal is not secure, I suggest that the retention of public confidence in all these intertwined matters is foremost in our consideration of the motion today.

I think it can be safely claimed that recent public events have not helped garner public confidence in the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005. The recent supergrass trial, which was clearly disturbing in its outcome, has given rise to this. That was manifested through its process, cost and its impact on public perception and confidence. The failure was on multiple levels.

Colleagues have appropriately highlighted and much of the media focus has centred on the fact that almost £6 million has been spent in total for one trial. We have not heard the full extent of that, given that legal aid costs are as yet unknown. It is illogical to imagine this to be sustainable. It is another modern monetary price for policing in our past.

That legislation is relatively new and largely untested in the legal circumstances of the North. The motion calls for a review to be held into its future practice. That suggestion is entirely reasonable politically and legally. The SDLP is on record saying consistently that a compelling case for community safety is required in order to, in any way, justify the use of that legislation. Thus far, that public confidence and layered accountability has not been exemplified or forthcoming. The Stewart case failed to provide grounds on how that system would protect the community and serve the interests of the rule of law. Events have, therefore, clarified that action is required.

I noted with concern the Minister of Justice's contribution to the Committee in which he pointed out that arrangements for accomplice evidence existed in common law for several centuries. I suggest to the Minister that to shelter behind the existence of similar legal practice and the longevity of its use in other jurisdictions is to renege on the sensitivity and complexity of our circumstances.

**Mr Beggs:** Does the Member accept that, if you do not allow weight to be given to accomplice evidence, you allow criminal organised gangs to continue without conviction?

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute added to his time.

**Mr Eastwood:** I do not know which speech the Member was listening to. The motion and my speech indicate that there are very particular circumstances in this part of the country. There is a real history about which we need to be aware. All that we are doing is calling for a review of the practice of the legislation. Therefore, perhaps, the Member wants to go away and read the motion that has been proposed.

**Mr B McCrea:** Will the Member give way?



**Mr Eastwood:** No. The motion clearly asks for a review of the legislation and its use. It will be clear to anybody who has watched any media coverage of the recent use of that legislation that a review is required. However, thanks to the Member for his intervention.

Surely, the devolution of justice and policing demands that we in the North come to our own decision on the use of those trials, hence it is necessary that a review is held. Since taking office, the Minister has shown himself to be very open to launching reviews, be they into the Prison Service or youth justice, etc. I urge him not to impede a review into the use of that legislation. In the interests of public confidence and the integrity of the legal system, it is, clearly, required. I support the motion.

**Mr Dickson:** Before us today is a menu of options: the original motion and the two amendments. In considering the options, I can rank them in order of the least to the most supportable. For reasons that I will set out, the motion itself is unacceptable and the DUP amendment unwise. Of the three, the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment seems to be the most acceptable. In respect of all three options, I want to start by commending the authors for highlighting the need for transparency, respect for rights and the importance of maximising public confidence — features which my party's Minister has been working hard to solidify and enhance since he was elected to that position.

In that respect alone, I can find something in the Sinn Féin motion to support. It is, however, far too general in nature, criticising the very concept of using assisting offenders. It cites the recent trial as evidence. However, it presents that evidence as a weakness of all such evidence rather than of the evidence in the trial alone. I could similarly cite cases in which evidence that is provided by assisting offenders proved effective in its use. We should not judge the legislation on the basis of a single case. Indeed, it would be foolish to do so.

The fact is that we need legislation to allow offenders to give evidence against others and have that co-operation recognised appropriately in their sentencing. In the recent case, Mr Justice Gillen himself said that the strategy has been used for hundreds of years. It is also a useful tool in fighting crime, as is recognised in the UUP amendment, which, as I said, we find worthy of some support.

The DUP amendment calls on the Minister and the Attorney General to call for a review of the operational decisions made about the murder of Mr English. That is something that we do not believe the Minister should agree to. The Minister has worked hard to ensure that he does not cross the lines that clearly demarcate what a Justice Minister should and should not become involved in. Operational decisions of the police and the PPS are two areas in which the Minister should not become involved. I was surprised to hear Members, especially those with a legal background, saying that the Minister and the Department have questions to answer with regard to the Tommy English murder trial. Either they are fully aware and are playing politics, or they need to get better advice before making such statements in future.

What the Minister has expressed a willingness to do is to review the legislation itself, if an adequate case is made to him. I am not aware of any such case having been made, and I have not heard an effective case made today, certainly

not yet. It appears that Mr Justice Gillen did not make a case for it in his recent judgment, in which he made it clear that it was the evidence, not the legislation — I repeat: the evidence, not the legislation — that was found wanting. The legislation under which the prosecution was brought is UK-wide. It is similar in nature to legislation in many other countries and is not specific to Northern Ireland. The statutory provisions have been examined in detail in several cases and have not been deemed to be substandard. Certainly, if there was any suggestion from the judiciary that they were substandard, they would need to be looked at, taking into experiences from elsewhere in the UK. At this stage, there does not seem to be any significant concern in the judiciary's mind in that regard.

I can understand the political and public concern at the failure to secure convictions in relation to the murder of Tommy English. I can also understand concerns about the considerable cost involved in the recent trial. However, at least the legal aid bill for cases of that nature will be lower in future due to the actions taken by the Justice Minister and the Assembly. I do not believe that we should do away with important and effective legislation on the basis of one disappointing case or that the case justifies the Minister moving into territory that he has, quite rightly, kept out of, despite misplaced political pressure.

The PPS decision to bring the prosecutions on the back of evidence given by the Stewart brothers will have been based on a number of tests, which we heard referenced here today. One is the likelihood of securing a conviction, and another is whether the prosecution is in the interests of justice. From what we have seen in the public domain —

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

**Mr Dickson:** — some may question why the prosecution was brought forward. I believe that it is right that we should support the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment in today's debate.

**Mr S Anderson:** I speak to amendment No 2, which has been tabled by my party colleagues. As is so often the case with those who propose a motion, it is important to read between the lines. It seems fairly clear that the Members opposite are opposed to the use of the supergrass system — full stop. They seem determined to make sure that every avenue is explored and every device utilised to ensure that police and army personnel are brought to account but seem less keen to ensure that those involved in terrorism are brought to account. It is those sorts of double standards that rankle with very many people. I hold the view that the use of supergrasses, or assisting offenders as they are now known under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, is a legitimate and very necessary weapon to bring terrorists to justice, and it must be maintained.

I know that the supergrass system is far from perfect and far from ideal. I can remember some of the high-profile cases that collapsed back in the 1980s — a long time before the current legislative framework was established. The new framework does change some aspects of those sorts of trials but, by and large, the key components remain the same today as they did in the 1980s. Reliance is placed on the testimony of those who, for whatever reason, are prepared to testify against former friends, and failure to secure convictions has usually been due to the bad

character of the witnesses and not the actual evidence itself. That was the case in the latest supergrass trial, and it is on that case, commonly known as the Tommy English murder trial, that I want to focus.

We really do need to learn lessons from what turned out to be a major farce. It led to the acquittal of 12 men on all the charges against them. Nine were charged with murder. It lasted over 70 days and has cost millions of pounds.

As my party's deputy leader, Nigel Dodds, said, it will go down as one of the most expensive trials in the history of Northern Ireland.

### 5.30 pm

We must also not forget that, behind all the statistics, it was a devastating experience and a most tragic outcome for Mrs English and her family. She had to relive the dreadful events surrounding the brutal murder of her husband, and, to add insult to injury, she then had to watch the accused walking away free, swaggering out of the court and congratulating themselves. Indeed, the arrogance of those men as they left the court was a sickening sight to many decent and right-thinking people, and it was a grim reminder of the paramilitary mafia that still holds too much sway in Northern Ireland.

The public want to see justice done. They want convictions, and they want to see those who are guilty of heinous crimes charged, tried and sentenced. However, they also believe that, in any democratic society, the judicial system must be fair and seen to be so. From the very start of the Tommy English murder trial, it was clear that the evidence of Robert and Ian Stewart lacked credibility and consistency. As the media reported daily on the case, it was obvious that it was a shambles, and many correctly predicted that it would collapse. The trial judge became increasingly irritated by the ramblings of the two brothers, who, he said, were proven liars. How on earth that bizarre case ever got to trial is beyond me. Surely the history and character of the two men should have led to the ringing of very loud alarm bells during the preliminary pre-trial stages. The Stewart brothers were interviewed on 330 occasions. The PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service should have been able to see through the two men, and I simply cannot get my head around how they were taken in by them. That is also a mystery to a lot of people, and it has not helped with public confidence.

The other issue that our amendment draws attention to is the fact that we remain puzzled and perturbed by the rather strange role of the independent oversight panel in the police investigation. That is the official title given to two individuals, Dame Nuala O'Loan and a London barrister, who provided assistance to the police on Operation Stafford, relating to crimes committed by the UVF in north Belfast. The Tommy English murder case was part of that broader operation, and it seems that the two members of the oversight panel were consulted by police. That issue was raised at the Justice Committee on 1 March, but we did not receive clear answers from the Minister or his officials. We need greater clarity on that, and more light needs to be shone on the role of that oversight panel.

Confidence in the judicial system has been shaken. That is why it is vital that we have an immediate review of the operational decisions taken in the Tommy English murder trial and the role of the independent oversight panel in the police investigation.

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

**Mr S Anderson:** I support amendment No 2.

**Mr G Kelly:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I join all the other Members who said that, in the first instance, this is about victims and families, who, after the trial collapsed and having waited for years with their hopes raised, did not get any closure or justice. In the process, the police, the courts and the Public Prosecution Service were all undermined. That is the difficulty that we face today.

Sinn Féin opposed supergrass trials in the 1980s. I know that Basil has a difficulty with the word "supergrass", but I do not mind if we call those involved supergrasses or assisting offenders. The issue is the same. We opposed those trials in the 1980s precisely because the evidence was tainted, and, if my memory serves me correctly, none of those trials succeeded. People were convicted, but the Court of Appeal let them all out again. Therefore, this is not the first time that we have seen this. The evidence from the 1980s is that supergrass trials do not work when tested, unless you take the view that putting people in jail over that period of time and then letting them out on appeal was a method of internment. The present legislation predates the transfer of justice and policing powers, so our fingerprints are not on it. However, Sinn Féin opposed the legislation at the time because of its lack of safeguards.

On a number of occasions, it has been said that we are dealing with a single case. However, the Tommy English murder trial was actually the second case. The other case, which was mentioned earlier, related to the murder of David McIlwaine and Andrew Robb. We should remember that the guy who was originally charged with the murder, Mark Burcombe, was convicted and given a two-and-a-half-year sentence. The family insisted and showed evidence that he had other information that pointed towards an agent who got off during that trial. Therein lies the difficulty. If the agents of the state — the agents of the PSNI — are being used or are involving themselves in very serious criminality, why are they not also being brought to book? In all the cases where agents have clearly been involved, no one else has been brought to book.

One of the core issues is that of agents and Special Branch handlers.

**Mr Beggs:** Does the Member accept that accomplice evidence could be useful in dealing with a wide range of criminals, such as drug dealers, fuel launderers or bank robbers, and that it is not just about former or current terrorists? As such, it is a useful tool that should be in the bag to address criminality.

**Mr G Kelly:** I accept that those who are involved in criminality should go to jail; it is as straightforward as that. However, we are trying to get a proper policing service and a judicial system that will put them in jail. My argument here is that this is the wrong way to use the law in that regard. Deals are done by the police or, indeed, the prosecution, for short sentences, and the question, in answer to what you said, is this: where is the scrutiny?

Let me give you an example. It was widely reported that one of the Stewart brothers was involved in sex with underage girls. Is it acceptable to the police, to the Members of the

Assembly, to ordinary people or to the Public Prosecution Service that such people should be given short sentences for giving evidence against others and be able to get themselves off the hook? That is the difficulty in this. If Patten was about anything and if the review of the justice system was about anything, it was to take us away from the types of practice that existed in the past. A return to supergrass trials or this type of evidence — I will call it “assisting offenders” — undermines years of work to turn this around.

Let me make another crucial point, which is in the PSNI policy statement on the 2005 Act. It states that the Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) of crime operations:

*“will sign off the Assisting Offender as a witness of truth.”*

First, I do not know who thought up the term “witness of truth”, because it is so easily attacked, but, if the ACC of crime operations is to be the person who does that, let us be clear that the ACC of crime operations is also the person who signs off on all police agents and their activities. Surely it is obvious to anyone in this room or anyone else that that is a huge conflict of interest in dealing with the issue of justice and bringing the right people to court and convicting them.

We want justice for victims. However, the justice system must be beyond reproach. I note that other Members mentioned how much this is costing and said that it could be as much as £10 million. It is not worth £10 million or 10p if it reverts to a system that has already been rejected on innumerable occasions by the Court of Appeal and others. At minimum, surely there needs to be a review of the operation of the legislation that can be debated in the Assembly.

When he talked about the amendments, Stewart Dickson made our case. He said that the Justice Minister will say that he cannot deal with operational issues. Therefore, why table an amendment that deals with operational issues when you know that the Minister will not be able to deal with it? This is about having a review of the legislation, which the Minister can deal with, and that is what he should be asked to do.

**Mr Weir:** In approaching this issue, which has been highlighted by the Tommy English murder trial, we should also remember that there is a family at the heart of it. Tommy English's family have been made victims. It is a tragedy, and, unfortunately, in this particular case, the system has turned a tragedy into a farce, one that has had a detrimental impact on the confidence that people had in the system.

Like the previous contributor — it may be one of the few points on which I agree with him — I am not hung up on the use of language. The use of the terms “assisting offenders” or “supergrasses” does not particularly bother me. Where I would differ and where I would be in closer agreement with the point made by Roy Beggs is that unlike, perhaps, the party opposite, we are not caught in some sort of 80s tribute act in which the prism of the supergrass system of the 1980s blinds us. Nor, indeed, are we in a blind spot about the evil machinations of the securocrats at every corner.

The SOCPA legislation is different from what was there in the 1980s. Protections have been put in place, and, as was indicated, this is not simply about how we deal with past crimes to do with terrorist activities. It is about dealing with a range of criminality, and, in the right circumstances, the opportunity for the justice system and the police to use

assisting offender evidence should be taken. Therefore, I am not complaining about the legislation itself. We have no desire to throw the baby out with the bathwater. The legislation itself is sound, although it was wrongly used and badly used in the Tommy English case.

As has been said, it is undoubtedly the case that, when you go into any trial, you cannot give the guarantee of a prosecution, and no one would suggest that there would be such a guarantee. Nor indeed has it been indicated that costs should act as an insuperable barrier to a case going ahead, although the figures suggest that the cost of this case is very large. In dealing with such a high-profile case, it has to be done on a sound basis.

**Mr B McCrea:** On the point you have made, I will quote from Hansard the comments of Mr McGrory at the Justice Committee. He said:

*“the trial judge took the view that he could still convict and that there was a credible basis on which there could be convictions at that stage”.*

That is a trial judge saying, without prejudging the outcome, that the evidence is OK.

**Mr Weir:** No, with respect. I am loath to pull the role of old barrister, and I agree with what Mr Allister said earlier. It is a rare occasion on which we find ourselves on the same page, and we may not do on other issues. Simply because the judge did not dismiss the case at the halfway stage does not indicate that this was a sound way forward for the prosecution. There was perhaps prima facie evidence but, on the basis of the test of whether there was a realistic chance of successful prosecution, it is not just hindsight that allows us to say that the case should not have gone ahead. Anyone looking at it would have said that.

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

**Mr Weir:** I will give way in a second. I appreciate the point that Mr McGrory made that anyone who is an offender is always open to a certain level of question, but the scale of the question marks over the Stewart brothers and the extent to which their credibility was shot through should have been picked up at a much earlier stage. That is not the voice of hindsight, because people raised it.

**Mr Allister:** The Member is absolutely right that it is very surprising that the DPP reached the conclusion to bring a prosecution. Does that raise the spectre that, perhaps, one of the concerns that we should have is that the DPP was taking the easy option of simply passing it over to the court instead of applying the real test of whether there was a realistic prospect of conviction because the DPP did not want to face the public opprobrium of not bringing a prosecution? Of course, that would have been very wrong. In hindsight, it has some of the signs of that, has it not?

**Mr Weir:** I certainly agree with the Member. It is difficult to know precisely what went through the head of the DPP in making the determination, but it should have been picked up much earlier and, indeed, should not have progressed to the level that it did. That is why, in our amendment, we are trying to focus in on the case. There needs to be a thorough investigation of the case and of the independent oversight panel.

In assisting offender evidence, the credibility of the witness is key. I appreciate that not all Members were able to attend when Mr McGrory appeared before the Committee. I listened to him, and, as you would expect, he made the best case that he could. However, I was not convinced by the responses that he gave. Clearly, there has been a falling down in connection with the case, but that does not mean that SOCPA itself should be called into question or is dead in the water. This case has damaged the justice system. We need an investigation into the case, and we need to look at the wider aspects of it. That is why I support the DUP amendment rather than the original motion or, indeed, the other amendment.

#### 5.45 pm

**Mr Hussey:** I begin by referring to the word “supergrass” in the motion tabled by Sinn Féin. “Grass” or “supergrass” is clearly a term of derision used against someone who informs on one of his own. In Northern Ireland terms, it is generally someone from a terrorist grouping who, to save his own neck, has decided to turn against his former allies and give evidence against them. There is no doubt that, in the most recent case to come before the courts in Northern Ireland, the assisting offenders were not considered by the judge to be the most reliable of witnesses, and, on the basis of that fact, he chose not to regard their evidence as reliable and released the accused.

To date, there is no evidence of a problem with the Act itself. Clearly, there are questions about how it is being applied, and the Act went through the various stages of inspection, review and interrogation in the House of Commons. In fact, several Members who sit on the Benches opposite could have taken the opportunity to speak in the House of Commons against the legislation, had they chosen to take their seat. The problem with the most recent case is that some of the decisions in the operation of the legislation are questionable and need to be accounted for.

There is no doubt in my mind that many in this community know of crimes that were committed in our recent past and have the ability to put murderers, bank robbers, bombers, drug dealers and money launderers behind bars. If any such person is willing to become an assisting offender, I would welcome their input into developing a case against a criminal. I would see their actions as deserving of credit, while their own crime would be deserving of punishment. The fact that they are prepared to raise their head above the parapet while their erstwhile colleagues hide indicates to me a change of heart and deserves a more lenient sentence, whereas those who are prepared to carry out major criminal acts deserve to have the full weight of the legal system brought to bear on them.

I agree that the criminal justice system must act in a transparent manner. No one can be seen to be above the law or even beyond it. Clearly, the fact that a trial is held is transparent. The fact that evidence is given in a court and, in many cases, covered in news bulletins and newspaper articles indicates transparency, and a judgement either for or against the accused is transparent. The fact that an assisting offender is identified and, perhaps, sentenced as such and gives evidence in an open court again highlights the transparency of our legal system. The very fact that the most recent case was, in effect, thrown out by the judge is again a transparent act in full, open public view.

The Sinn Féin motion refers to the

*“rights and entitlements of all citizens”.*

I fully support those rights. However, our amendment adds “protects the public against criminals”, and that strengthens the motion. Someone who has lost a loved one to a terrorist bomb, someone whose life has been destroyed by a terrorist bullet or someone who has been crippled by a group of thugs is entitled to see the perpetrators in a court of law. Unfortunately, in many of cases, the perpetrator does not face a court because of the code of loyalty between himself and his cohorts. However, if one cannot live with what he has done and chooses to hand himself into the authorities and reveal what he knows to the police, I strongly believe that, if the evidence he provides stands up following a review by the Public Prosecution Service, a case should be brought.

The law as it stands is not at fault. The judge in the most recent case did not criticise the law but found that he could not believe the witnesses, who I believe were unable to provide reliable evidence as they had ruined their lives through drink and drug addiction. I cannot, therefore, support the Sinn Féin motion, and I believe that my party's amendment allows us to support the victim rather than the perpetrators of the horrendous crimes that were committed against society over many years in the past, and it would allow us to ensure that we also have that tool in our legislation for use in the future.

**Mr Lynch:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. Following the collapse of the Tommy English trial, there has been considerable public concern about the continued use of this type of supergrass trial. The Minister said in response to a question in this House that he believes that what we have under the 2005 Act is very different from what happened 30 years ago, but many are already beginning to seriously question whether there are any real differences.

The supergrass trials of the 1980s collapsed because of a flawed process that severely damaged what semblance of justice we had at that time. Under the current legislation, the few cases that have come to trial are beginning to show major fault lines and have the ability to undermine confidence in our fledgling justice system. The Director of Public Prosecutions agreed with us on that at last week's Justice Committee meeting.

We are also told that the Act provides a more structured and transparent process. It may be more structured, but it is certainly not transparent. The Brown case has been used to defend the legislation. Again, that case was far from flawless, and many families are left very disappointed at the outcome of that trial, as some of my colleagues have said. Some feel that the state has used the legislation to cover the actions of state agents.

One of the tests in the process is that assisting offenders, as they are called, be deemed to be truthful and honest. The process of inducement, in my opinion, leads people to be liars. That is exactly what happened in the most recent case.

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

**Mr Lynch:** No. There is not much time left, anyhow.

Minister, I live in a border county and have known of people, one of whom was a member of my party, being murdered by loyalists in neighbouring counties across the border. Will the Minister tell me what would happen if an assisting offender, under the legislation, confessed to one of those killings? What implication would that have? Would extradition arrangements be put in place?

The collapse of the Tommy English murder trial has dented public confidence in the judicial system. Supergrass-type trials were used in the past and were proved to be flawed. What is happening with the current legislation is creating the basis to repeat that. If other trials of this nature in the future have a similar outcome, we will be back saying that this is flawed legislation also and that we need to re-examine it. Unless we examine it now, by that stage the damage will have been done.

Finally, I call on the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General to use their powers to call for the immediate review of the operation of the legislation.

**Mr A Maginness:** First of all, the collapse, as it were, of this particular case was very damaging. It has damaged public confidence in the administration of justice, and there needs to be a rebuilding of that.

A number of issues are being confused. One is the 2005 Act, as if that Act invented accomplice evidence. Of course, it did not; it merely provided a framework in which accomplice evidence could be presented to the public and the courts. What it did was make public the terms of any deal that was done between the Crown or the police and the Public Prosecution Service and an assisting offender. It gave an element of transparency to that, which was important in making sure that all the circumstances surrounding any arrangement between the Crown and the accomplice were disclosed. That is what the Act did, and, if you were to effectively repeal the Act or the relevant sections of the Act, you would still have accomplice evidence, and we would be back to the position of the 1980s, when there was no disclosure of any arrangements between the Crown and an accomplice. Furthermore, it would be a worse position, because the protection of corroborative evidence is now no longer extant due to other legal decisions, and therefore cannot be relied on. We are in a worse position as far as that is concerned.

As a representative of North Belfast, I say that the public in North Belfast are disturbed. However, the public in North Belfast also see the fact that a man was murdered in front of his wife and children in a most brutal fashion and in the most horrific circumstances and that those who carried out, organised and arranged the killing are still at large and have not been brought to justice. That disturbs people more than anything else, and Members should concentrate their mind on that.

I believe that it was in the public interest for the prosecution to take place. The public interest demanded that a prosecution take place if there was sufficient evidence. It is up to the Director of Public Prosecutions to determine that. The Director of Public Prosecutions came to the Committee and explained the position of his office. He did not personally make the decision, but he explained his office's position and his predecessor's reasoning.

It is worth pointing out that, when it came to an application by the defence counsel, the trial judge did not accede to the application that there was no case to answer. He accepted that there was a case to answer. So there was a certain level of evidence that was acceptable to the court and the learned trial judge. Ultimately, he rejected the evidence placed before him — the evidence of the accomplices — but that evidentiary test was satisfied in the court. It is important to remember that, and I believe that the public interest was served by the trial going ahead.

Other issues have been raised by Members, particularly those on the DUP Benches, about the oversight panel. DUP Members seem to have an obsession with Baroness O'Loan as some sort of bogeywoman who interferes in all this. The oversight panel was agreed by the Policing Board.

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

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

**Mr A Maginness:** In fact, the DUP has members on that board and was, therefore, implicitly involved in that agreement.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Time.

**Mr A Maginness:** I think the Chairperson wanted me to give way. I am happy to do so.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** I call Jim Allister.

**Mr Allister:** In some quarters, it has been said that, in addition to the men in the dock, the 2005 Act was on trial in Laganside courts. To an extent that is true, but not entirely so. In so far as it was true, one would have to say that the processes of the Act have emerged damaged. That is unfortunate. Accomplice evidence is not new and has been with us for a very long time. In one sense, accomplice evidence is both the best and the worst of evidence. It is the best of evidence in that it comes from those who know because they were there when crimes were committed; it is the worst of evidence because it often comes from parties so tainted by their past and involvement in widespread criminality that their credibility is in question. However, it is evidence that is capable of being produced and that should, in the right circumstances, be produced.

What is damaging in this case is the prosecution being brought in circumstances in which it was abundantly clear that the primary evidence came from witnesses who were broken reeds and were unlikely ever to be believed. Nothing that Mr Justice Gillen said in his quite robust criticism of the Stewart brothers was news to the DPP DPP staff knew exactly the frail nature of the evidence that they were bringing, and yet they brought it. In bringing it, I think that they knew what the inevitable outcome would be. I do not think that anyone analysing that evidence would ever have thought that a judge or jury could convict on it. However, they brought it, and the question that troubles me is why they did. If it is a matter of applying the legitimate test that there is a realistic prospect of conviction, bearing in mind the frailty of the evidence and its credibility problems, it beggars belief, in my mind, how they could have concluded that there was a realistic prospect —

**6.00 pm**

**Mr B McCrea:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Allister:** In a moment.

That drives me to the unfortunate conclusion that, as I expressed earlier, the DPP staff took the easy option. They said, "This is too hot to handle; let the judge decide. That saves us from the public criticism of not bringing the prosecution." If that is right, that was a very wrong decision, and one that —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** We have to go to the response.

**Mr Allister:** — leaves difficulty in regard to the prosecution and the outcome of the case.

I will give way to Mr McCrea.

**Mr B McCrea:** Can I just —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Sorry; we are going to the Minister to respond.

**Mr Allister:** Why?

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Minister.

**Mr A Maginness:** Surely there was an intervention.

**Mr Allister:** On a point of order.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** I will explain. We were out of time. We allowed Mr Allister in with a three-minute sort of proviso, which was indicated beforehand. We are running out of time, so I call the Minister to respond.

**Mr Allister:** On a point of order. I do not accept that I am, in any sense, a second-class citizen of the House and entitled to less time than others to speak. I gave way to Mr McCrea. He should be entitled to speak, and I should be entitled to an extra minute.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Order. It was after the three minutes. I am calling the Minister to respond.

**Mr B McCrea:** On a point of order. With respect, we are talking about only two minutes. I am not, in any way, challenging your decision; I accept it absolutely —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Order. It is not my judgement that you should question; it is the Business Committee, which sets the times. I am simply a servant of those. I call the Minister.

**Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice):** I start by acknowledging the importance of the issue, and I congratulate those who tabled the motion. It is absolutely right that the Assembly should debate issues of high public interest, such as the use of evidence from assisting offenders brought under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005. I acknowledge, as others have done today, the suffering of the families of Tommy English and of David McIlwaine and Andrew Robb, who were also named during the debate.

I support one of the key premises for the motion, which is the need to build and secure confidence in the justice system across all sections of the community. One of the purposes of a debate such as today's has to be to get beyond the rhetoric and the knee-jerk reactions that the case has generated. Care needs to be taken not to rely too greatly on a single case in judging changes to the law. Any individual case has unique factors that determine its

success or failure. In this instance, it is absolutely right that the Director of Public Prosecutions should consider whether there are any implications for future cases under the legislation, as he has said that he will do. There is, of course, ongoing dialogue between the Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Police Service about the conduct of prosecutions.

I recognise that one of the themes from the debate has been the call to change the legislation so that the prosecution of cases cannot rely on assisting offenders. Members noted that the assisting offender arrangements that were put in place by the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 codified a long-standing common law practice, which dates back to at least the 17th century, to encourage individuals to bring forward evidence against major criminals who would otherwise escape being called to account for their crimes. One of the key points of debate around the House seems to be how far we should recognise the fact that that common law practice exists and how far we should consider the differences that SOCPA brought seven years ago. Without wishing to intrude too far into the internal workings of the SDLP, it seemed that there was an interesting difference of opinion between Colum Eastwood's and Alban Maginness's views about whether we had seen benefits from having a statutory basis rather than merely a common law basis.

Looking back to the 1980s, I certainly understand the historical resonances. In particular, I understand why members of Sinn Féin are concerned by the current operation of SOCPA because of their view of what the justice system should look like. However, I disagree with them. The statutory assisting offenders' regime, which is seen right across the United Kingdom in all three jurisdictions, introduces a number of important safeguards. They include a formal written agreement between a prosecutor and an assisting offender, and the availability of a reference back to court if an offender knowingly fails to give the assistance promised. In addition, the fact that someone —

**Mr McCartney:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Ford:** Certainly.

**Mr McCartney:** Does the Minister accept the word of the Director of Public Prosecutions, who said that not one case has been referred back in England and Wales? It is hardly a protection.

**Mr Ford:** I suppose I would say that it would be an indication of things working well if no cases had been referred back, because in the mind of the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales, that would suggest that the system was working adequately.

**Mr McCartney:** They would say that, wouldn't they?

**Mr Ford:** Without being aware of the precise facts of all those assisting offender cases in England and Wales, I do not think that either Mr McCartney or I am in a position to give a blanket judgement on them.

Unlike what might have been thought about the previous common law position, the process is now designed to be open, auditable and with clear safeguards built in. That was demonstrated, for example, in the case that was cited previously — the sentencing of Mark Birkham — in which

the judge explained the sentence that would have been given but for the assistance that was provided. It is also important to record that, in the case of Brown, on evidence, including that from Mark Birkham, a murderer was brought to justice using the assisting offender route to secure the conviction of somebody who might otherwise have walked free, despite having committed two heinous murders. The relatives of the victims in that case would otherwise have had no justice.

The judgement in the trial of Haddock and others clearly raises issues about the credibility of the two assisting offenders. However, I do not believe that it invalidates the future use of the approach. Indeed, I question whether Members would take the same view of a case in which the accomplice of a drug dealer or a bank robber gave credible evidence that helped to secure the conviction of a serious offender. Do we really want to prohibit such a possibility in all circumstances?

The incentive created by the provisions whereby an individual would secure a lower sentence than would otherwise be the case was also mentioned. I understand that concern. However, in the case of Blackburn, and to repeat what Mr Givan quoted, the court made clear that:

*"like the process which provides for a reduced sentence following a guilty plea, this is a longstanding and entirely pragmatic convention. The stark reality is that without it major criminals who should be convicted and sentenced for offences of the utmost seriousness might, and in many cases, certainly would escape justice ... The solitary incentive to encourage co-operation is provided by a reduced sentence, and the common law, and now statute, have accepted that this is a price worth paying".*

Equally, in discussions that I have had with the Chief Constable about the Haddock case, he has made it clear to me that the Police Service did not hold relevant evidence that would have secured the conviction of the Stewart brothers before they came forward and made admissions about the crimes that they committed. That highlights that, for these two individuals, a lower sentence was not what made them come forward, given that they might not otherwise have faced proceedings at all.

Of course, the legislation may also apply where there is already evidence against an individual. In either case, it is for the PPS to determine whether it is in the public interest to enter into an agreement with the offender, while taking account of the nature and extent of the information given or offered. The criminality of the individual must be dealt with first.

In addition, the Act enables a reference back to court if the offender knowingly fails to give the assistance that was promised. The DPP is considering that in this case, but, as was highlighted, that is an operational matter for the director and is not something for me as Minister.

I will turn to Members' comments. Jennifer McCann outlined what she saw as the key case against the operation of SOCPA. She saw insufficient safeguards and was concerned that it was simply a resumption of the old system of the 1980s. I hope that, through my remarks so far, I have outlined why I do not accept that that is the position. Whatever the situation may have been in the 1980s, I believe that the statutory basis for the current Act leads us into a position that is entirely different to that of the previous common

law. To some extent, Basil McCrea answered those points when he, in effect, objected to her use of the language about supergrasses. He also made it clear that, in his view, criminals should go to prison and the best available evidence should be put forward against them. The challenge facing us is the extent to which we take assisting offender evidence as the basis that will assist towards convictions.

In moving his amendment, Paul Givan raised a number of concerns about the operation of the monitoring panel. However, as others said, that panel was set up by the Police Service and was agreed by the Policing Board when every party in the Assembly, except Mr Allister's and mine, was represented on the board.

**Mr Craig:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Ford:** Just to finish the point before giving way, Mr Givan is correct to say that I referred in the Committee to the monitoring panel as "unusual". However, I used the term "unusual" in response to his use of the term "abnormal". I do not think that the pejorative adjective that he used was appropriate.

**Mr Craig:** I thank the Minister for giving way. I have listened several times now to the statement that the previous Policing Board agreed to the setting up of this independent oversight panel. The reality is that the Policing Board had no say whatsoever in that, and objections to it were recorded from this party's member of the panel that looked at the issue. It is wrong to label the Policing Board as having been behind the oversight panel or supporting it. There was dissension because of the make-up of that oversight panel.

**Mr Ford:** If I was inaccurate in my terminology, I apologise. I was not involved. We can agree that it is the case that members of the Policing Board were aware of the arrangements.

Towards the end of the debate, Seán Lynch asked me what the implications would be for an extradition case. I must confess that I am not sure that I can say what would happen if there were to be an extradition case, but I can repeat the point I made previously. Under the operation of SOCPA, there would be a clear and transparent process in which assisting offenders would appear in court, be convicted of their part in offences, receive an appropriately reduced sentence openly and transparently in court and then be expected to give evidence. That is the fundamental difference as to where we are.

I also take the point that was made by Alban Maginness, that the Act now provides a framework for the operation of accomplice evidence. The issue that seems to be being raised, in general terms, is whether that framework is adequate or whether there are other aspects which need to be dealt with.

**Mr A Maginness:** I am obliged to the Minister for giving way. Following the logic of what you have just said, is it not timely that we look at the Act and at the operation of this legislation and, given the circumstances — the collapse of the trial and the public outcry in relation to it — there should be an in-depth review of its operation? That is entirely reasonable and, I would have thought, entirely acceptable to your good self as well as to the SDLF, including my colleague and myself.

**A Member:** Harmony restored.

**Mr Ford:** I am delighted to have promoted harmony within the SDLP at least, if I have no other achievement this afternoon. I will deal with the points which Mr Maginness has just made as I conclude, but I need to be cautious about going too far into the specific operational issues of one case, rather than the general principles.

I suppose the final speech, whether or not truncated, allowed Jim Allister to make the fundamental point that accomplice evidence is at times both the best and the worst, and we need to find a way of resolving that.

As I said in opening, this is a very important issue of high public interest and importance, but let me draw the House's attention again to the comments on the legislation itself in Mr Justice Gillen's judgement:

*"This judgment should not be seen as, and is not intended to be, a comment much less a criticism of the structure of the SOCPA regime which accommodates the use of accomplice evidence. ... Its purpose is to adopt the pragmatic approach that without it major criminals who should be convicted and sentenced for offences of the most egregious nature might, and in many cases, certainly would escape justice....That I have not been ... satisfied"*

— beyond a reasonable doubt —

*"in this instance does not preclude the possibility of guilty verdicts in other similar cases where less flawed witnesses are called to give evidence."*

I am conscious that the director, in his evidence to the Justice Committee, pointed to a procedural query on which he was taking advice, so I am writing to him, the PSNI and the Police Ombudsman's Office to see if they have identified any significant issues about the general terms of the legislation. I will also take account of what has been said in the debate and what remains to be said, but I cannot work on the presumption that there is something wrong based on a single case. I will continue to listen to the views of Members and the agencies that I have highlighted. I will certainly review the Hansard report of the debate.

On the basis of my comments, whilst I accept the generality of much that has been said, I oppose the wording of the motion, although there is much within its intent with which I agree, including the system operating in a transparent and open manner, respecting rights and maximising public confidence. My objection is principally because the operation of the legislation is not a matter within my powers.

### 6.15 pm

I also oppose amendment No 2, although it has parts I can accept because of its reference to operational decisions. Although amendment No 1 is not entirely in language I would use, I would, however, support it. It touches on my role, recognises the part that SOCPA can play, reflects the need for public confidence and seeks positive working relationships in the operation of the legislation and adequate accountability measures.

I welcome the debate, which has aired an important issue about SOCPA and its operation. I support the motion, subject to amendment No 1.

**Mr Craig:** I support amendment No 2, which my colleague tabled. This case has indeed undermined public confidence in the justice system. What I find amazing is that in spite of 330 interviews by the PSNI, we are left with a case with no convictions. We need to think about that when it comes to public confidence.

In more recent times, this independent oversight panel has looked into the case. We need to ask ourselves the fundamental question: why did the case go forward? I have heard other Members refer to issues around all that. Was it the DPP or the cop-out? Did the police get it so dramatically wrong? Could they not see after 330 interviews that those witnesses were not credible, or was some other force telling those people to push the case forward?

I am left with a doubt in my mind. Was somebody exerting external influence? Why was the case pushed forward and moved into the judicial system, and why did it then go through almost the entire case before the judge said "No, these are not credible witnesses"? I would have thought that anybody with any amount of reason would have said to themselves long before the case got to court, or even as it progressed through the court, that those individuals just are not credible and this will not stack up or lead to a safe conviction, and it would have been collapsed an awful lot sooner. However, we did not see that, so I am left asking why.

There is this doubt in the back of our mind with regard to the role of the oversight panel in all of this. That is why we are supporting the amendment and asking for a review of not only the case and how it was carried out but what other influences there were on the case as it stands.

I listened with great interest to what Alban Maginness said about this and that we should not be obsessed with a bogeywoman. I am using the Member's term, not mine. I am not obsessed with a bogeywoman. In fact, I have no opinions on that individual at all if I am being absolutely honest. However, there is in our mind a clear conflict of interest. How can you sit in oversight of a trial that was triggered by a process that you, as an individual, were key in triggering? You trigger a process and then sit as someone who has influence over that process. There is a clear conflict of interest there.

As a party, we are interested in seeing whether there are outworkings that brought undue pressure. Is there something that forced it to go to the point that it did? I believe and accept the argument that this does indeed undermine confidence in the judicial system. There is no question about that. Any trials that do not lead to convictions ultimately have a question mark over them.

I have heard a number of Members refer to someone who is being left out in a lot of this. That is, the victims. We have all talked around the shop, but in all of the trials that ultimately fail we forget about the victims — those who have suffered. I ask the House to consider what our amendment is saying, which is: look into this trial, see what went wrong, have a look at the oversight role and see whether anything in that led to that outcome. That is all we are asking for.

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

**Mr Craig:** We are not undermining the principle of the system for witnesses, because we are in total agreement with the Minister that it is something that the judiciary and



the legal system have always used, and it is better today than it was in the past.

**Mr Beggs:** The motion expresses concern about the evidence provided by supergrasses. "Supergrass" is widely recognised as a derogatory term for accomplice evidence. Attempts were widely made during the debate to link the current procedures to the supergrass trials of the 1980s. However, we have a different system today.

The Ulster Unionist Party recognises the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 as a powerful tool to address crime, which is something that we have added to our amendment. So, we ask all Members whether they want to add another tool to help the police address crime.

My colleagues Basil McCrea and Ross Hussey highlighted the fact that the motion is an attempt to link the discredited term "supergrass" from the 1980s to today.

Modern gangs are frequently very forensically aware. There can be tight-knit groups that can impose themselves on communities. That can create an element of fear, and there has been evidence of that. However, this is much wider than talking about gangs that are involved in paramilitary activity. As I said earlier, how are we going to address the drug gangs that exist, which profiteer at the expense of our young people? Those gangs are frequently as ruthless and well organised as paramilitary groups: in fact, some of their members are former paramilitaries and are, therefore, knowledgeable about forensics.

So, the issue is much wider than the paramilitary interest of an historical nature; it is about how we are going to address criminal gangs today. Members must not just think about the past, they must think about the future. I fail to understand why Sinn Féin and the SDLP appear to be opposing accomplice evidence.

**Mr A Maginness:** We are not.

**Mr Beggs:** They are opposing it in this case. Certainly, Sinn Féin is opposing it.

**Mr A Maginness:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr Beggs:** Yes.

**Mr A Maginness:** There is nothing in the Sinn Féin motion that opposes accomplice evidence. It calls for a review of the way the legislation operates.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** The Member has an extra minute in which to speak.

**Mr Beggs:** I listened very carefully to what the Sinn Féin Members said over the course of the debate, and it was very clear that they are opposed to accomplice evidence.

**Mr A Maginness:** Yes, but their motion is different.

**Mr Beggs:** What they say has a bearing on my judgement of what they are doing. The wording in their motion is a method of achieving an objective. What they are clearly saying, and what they no doubt will be saying in what they publish — I ask you to read the Hansard report very carefully to see what they said during the debate —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Make all remarks through the Chair.

**Mr Beggs:** Jennifer McCann, Gerry Kelly and Seán Lynch all clearly oppose the use of accomplice evidence. What is their view on other jurisdictions? Do they oppose the use of accomplice evidence in other jurisdictions? That will pose a problem for them when they go to the electorate there. We are interested in solving crime here in Northern Ireland; therefore, I recognise it as a valuable tool. How are the citizen and the community to be protected?

Paul Givan indicated his support for the Ulster Unionist amendment, but then expressed a preference for his own amendment. I ask him to reassess that, given what Members have said. It is clear that the Alliance Party supports the Ulster Unionist amendment, and if he wishes for the motion to be changed I ask him to support the Ulster Unionist amendment, which clearly has the potential to do that, whereas his own does not.

**Mr Givan:** Will the Member consider the fact that his party's amendment fails to draw in the independent oversight panel, which, to me, is the kernel of what is being discussed? Therefore, the Member should not put that amendment to the vote, but should allow ours to go to the vote and support it along with other parties.

**Mr Beggs:** It is clear from what has been said that that would fail, because the Alliance Party has indicated its opposition to your amendment. I want to improve the motion to get something that will work. The Alliance Party's Stewart Dickson indicated that the motion is unacceptable and that the DUP amendment is unwise. Indeed, the Minister seemed to indicate his agreement with that and that the Ulster Unionist amendment is the most acceptable. The Minister also indicated that it is important for him not to cross the demarcation in the justice system.

A number of Members, including Peter Weir and Jim Allister, indicated that the SOCPA legislation has potential but appears to be wrongly and badly used and that it is very unfortunate that there has not been a successful outcome in a case involving such huge public expense. A number of Members suggested that that was down to a failure to assess the credibility of the key witnesses, and most would agree with that thinking. Alban Maginness highlighted a problem for us all: the murderers of Tommy English are still at large; how will we ever address them?

I ask Members to support the Ulster Unionist amendment so that accomplice evidence can continue and so that we indicate our support for that method.

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

**Mr Beggs:** We ask for your support.

**Mr McCartney:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I seek support for the motion proposed by Sinn Féin. Most of what I have heard this afternoon leads me to say that Members should support it. I have not heard a single issue raised this afternoon that could not be covered in a review. Think of all the things that Members have said this afternoon: is there anything that a review would not bring to the fore and allow us to discuss?

When Members have pointed out things that happened in England and Wales, I have heard the Minister quite rightly tell the Assembly many times that this is not England and Wales but the North of Ireland where we have our own jurisdiction. Why should we not have a legislative process that will allow us all to bring to the table all the issues that have been raised here this afternoon? Who fears a review?

We have quoted the trial judge on a number of occasions this afternoon. Indeed, some people have interpreted him. In times past, we were always cautioned about trying to second-guess the words of a judge. However, the judge said very clearly:

*"Parliament has passed this legislation and it is for the courts to interpret and implement it faithfully."*

Irrespective of the legislation that will come out of the review, would it not be better if a judge in some future trial could say that the Assembly had passed this legislation and not some other Parliament? That is the test, and people need to bring that to the debate.

We have our view of this type of trial. It is flawed at its core because people are given inducement to give evidence. When people have had inducements to provide evidence in front of the courts in the past, the cases were taken through the courts. Not only were people, on some occasions, acquitted at the Court of Appeal but, for a long period, people questioned the quality of justice practised in the courts at the time.

It has been quoted again today that this sort of concept has been in common law for hundreds of years. If it is in common law, why did it have to be codified all of a sudden? The reason why it had to be codified is that it had to be dressed up. I have not heard any Member here today questioning the quality of justice that was practised in the 1980s.

### 6.30 pm

We are told that the new legislation is different. We are now told the deal that the accomplice gets, whereas, in the past, that was kept a secret. People tell me that that is some sort of qualitative difference and that we are all going to wake up and discover that we know the deal now, but we did not know it in the past, and that it will make us all feel that the scales of justice have suddenly been removed from our eyes, but I just do not see it.

**Mr B McCrea:** I want to put the general position to you. Taking away the 1980s and the paramilitary stuff, I want to know for the record whether there are any circumstances in which you think, with appropriate safeguards, where accomplice evidence is reliable, and if an accomplice comes forward and gives evidence, that that should be taken to mitigate his sentence? In principle, is there a yes to that?

**Mr McCartney:** It is fine putting up the conjecture, but if you show me the instance when it has happened, I might be able to answer it. Are you saying that, in this particular instance, and in all the cases in the 1980s, all those people came forward and said —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** All remarks through the Chair.

**Mr McCartney:** Are you saying that all those people who came forward had, all of a sudden, had a road to Damascus conversion? Did the Stewart brothers have a road to Damascus conversion? If you are putting something forward, make

sure that it is solid. The law is tested on something that is solid, not on something that is a "what if" or a "what about". Are the Stewart brothers reliable witnesses? I think that the court decided that they were not. That is one of the tests. Jim Allister made that point, and I think that he encapsulated it —

**Mr B McCrea:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr McCartney:** No, I will not give way because I have important points to make.

He encapsulated it. The legislation was on trial. It is interesting that the trial judge said that:

*"courts are the keepers of the rule of law and, borrowing a phrase of an 18th century American judge, if it is to be more than a mere rope of sand, a court must never set aside the legal standards that lie at its very heart."*

That is the core of this, and that is why there should be a review. Perhaps the Minister felt that I was second-guessing what Barra McGrory had said. However, last Thursday, Barra McGrory said to our Committee:

*"Therefore, I have checked with the Director of Public Prosecutions in England and Wales and his senior legal adviser, and they have never referred one of these cases back under that provision ... However, in their experience, a number of similar cases in England and Wales have failed to secure convictions, yet they have not sought to initiate that procedure."*

Therefore, it is not one trial. It is at least two. Therefore, there is no process in place.

The Stewart brothers were given a deal and induced to give evidence. Sometimes, people question the role of the Public Prosecution Service, but the RUC or the PSNI signed off by saying that the assisting offender — offenders, in this case — were witnesses of truth. That is what was brought to the door of the Public Prosecution Service. The trial judge said that those people were liars and embellishers, and they colluded with one another to give evidence. Indeed, he even said that their demeanour in the witness box showed beyond reasonable doubt that they were liars. That is the test of this.

When Basil comes up with the idea of a lily-white accomplice coming in and having a pang of conscience, we do not see it in this legislation, and we did not see it in the 1980s. It was flawed then, and, in our opinion, it is flawed now. Therefore, if there was a trial process, as outlined by Jim Allister, the recent trial showed us that it is time for the Assembly to review the legislation so that, whatever we do in the future, none of us can say here today that we gave our support to this legislation.

**Mr Allister:** I fear that the Member is obfuscating the point that Mr McCrea tried to raise. You were asked a very simple question: if there was an accomplice about whom you had no doubts, say someone who was involved in the Northern Bank robbery who you might admire, and he came forward to give evidence, would you accept his evidence? Do you accept accomplice evidence, yes or no?

**Mr McCartney:** I am surprised at someone who has practised law putting a proposition laced with "what ifs". The simple thing about all of this is in front of us. Has there been an instance when that type of person has come

forward and a person or persons have been convicted? Why is that the case? The only reason why the Stewart brothers found themselves in court is because they were seeking an inducement. It was not down to some sort of feeling they had that they had done wrong. Indeed, many people will speculate. Jonathan Craig talked about speculation, and we can speculate until the cows home about who they were and what they were.

**Mr B McCrea:** On that point, the Justice Minister was quite clear. He reviewed the evidence against the Stewart brothers and said that it was not sufficient to get any form of conviction. When they came forward to do something, it was not with a view to getting a lenient conviction or sentence, because they were not in line to get any conviction or any sentence. That is why it was interesting to hear what they had to say.

**Mr McCartney:** It is very interesting. Those two people were liars. They were found to be such in the court, yet you are willing to believe that the —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Please address all remarks through the Chair.

**Mr McCartney:** The Member is suggesting that the Chair should believe that those two people came forward in the circumstances in which they outlined. Let us face it: everything that they said was discredited, as were the circumstances in which they presented themselves to the PSNI, the circumstances in which they gave their evidence and the circumstances that led them to the court. You would not buy a second-hand car from any of them. Let me put it like that.

Our position is very clear, and I have said that today. I have listened to many good points made by Members. The way to deal with each and every one of the points that were made in the Chamber this afternoon is to have a review of the legislation. What better way to achieve confidence? What better way to ensure that the courts are not a rope of sand? In the past, the courts were ropes of sand. The courts in the North were brought into disrepute. Remember this: people would have argued and made the same contention then that they are making this afternoon, that the witnesses, the accomplices, the supergrasses — whatever you want to call them —

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Please draw your remarks to a close.

**Mr McCartney:** — were credible people, until the courts and public opinion found otherwise.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that if the amendment is made, I will not be putting the Question on amendment No 2, as the wording to which it relates will have been deleted. I hope that is clear.

*Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 15; Noes 56.*

#### AYES

*Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Hussey and Mr B McCrea.*

#### NOES

*Mr Agnew, Mr S Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dallat, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Miss M McLveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Sheehan, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lynch and Mr McCartney.*

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Question put, That amendment No 2 be made.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 27; Noes 43.*

#### AYES

*Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Miss M McLveen, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Weir.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr S Anderson and Mr G Robinson.*

#### NOES

*Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lynch and Mr McCartney.*

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Main Question put.*

*The Assembly divided: Ayes 30; Noes 40.*

#### AYES

*Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Eastwood, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Sheehan.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lynch and Mr McCartney.*

#### NOES

*Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree,*

*Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Dickson and Mr G Robinson.*

*Main Question accordingly negatived.*

*Motion made:*

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.]*

## Adjournment

### West Tyrone: Sport, Culture and Tourism

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** The proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes in which to speak. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately eight minutes.

**Mr Byrne:** Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I am thankful to the Business Committee and your office for allowing this Adjournment debate to be tabled. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker and fellow Members, there is a thematic context to the three areas of activity that are mentioned in the title of the Adjournment topic. In 1985, a major economic report was done on the county of Tyrone, and one of its major comments referred to the rich cultural heritage of the people of Tyrone, as strongly evidenced by the county structure for both the GAA and the Orange Order. Sport and sporting activity play a major role in the life of people, particularly the young, across the constituency, ranging from Gaelic sports, rugby, soccer, hockey, boxing, tennis and cricket among others.

Two key people have contributed enormously through their volunteer work in sports coaching. One is Brother Ennis of the Christian Brothers in Omagh, who has made an enormous contribution to the promotion and development of Gaelic games in west Tyrone. Mr Jackie Reid, a former PE teacher in Omagh Academy, has made a similar contribution to the promotion of rugby in the Omagh area and, indeed, in Dungannon. Both men epitomise personal dedication and commitment to sport and community development.

Tyrone has enjoyed great success in Gaelic football by winning three All-Ireland senior titles in 2003, 2005 and 2008. They have also won numerous All-Ireland minor titles and many Ulster titles. The GAA in Tyrone is very strong, and there are many excellent clubs in west Tyrone particularly that have built up excellent facilities over the past 25 years. Clubs such as Aghyaran, Castlederg and Clady have shown what can be done with local effort and community support.

Other clubs in the Strabane district, including Clann na nGael, Aughabrack and Glenelly, have good pitch and related facilities. Sigersons Gaelic football club in Strabane is a prime example of an excellent GAA club that has built excellent facilities to cater for youth and adult footballers and hurlers.

#### 7.15 pm

In Omagh district, we have many excellent clubs. In Omagh itself, there is Killyclogher, Drumragh, Dromore, Trillick, Fintona, Eskra, Carrickmore, Loughmacrory, Greencastle and Drumquin among others. Another very successful club has been Errigal Ciarán at Dunmoyle, which again has excellent facilities. The GAA has a fantastic track record in coaching and promoting sporting activities for young people, and the investment of money and time in the promotion and development of youth games has brought its reward in the winning of many national titles.

The new Garvaghy GAA centre is primarily geared towards coaching and the promotion and development of young people playing Gaelic games. The Tyrone county board has put in a massive investment of over £4 million to date, including €1.5 million from Croke Park, and the three councils in Omagh, Dungannon and Strabane have put in enormous amounts of investment: £100,000 from Omagh council; £80,000 from Dungannon council; and £50,000 is promised from Strabane council. More investment capital is needed to complete the project. It is a very worthwhile sports development project that deserves support for capital funding from the Northern Ireland Executive and the Sports Council of Northern Ireland. There is a range of sporting groups and associations, and it is important that their contribution is recognised.

The Youth Sport complex in Omagh was built a number of years ago as a multi-sports complex catering mainly for field sports, and £2.4 million has been invested there over the past 10 years. However, that facility now needs a 3G synthetic pitch, and that will require another £200,000 of investment. There are many junior and amateur soccer clubs throughout Omagh and Strabane, some of which have good facilities, such as those in Castlederg and Strabane town. Omagh District Council owns a number of soccer pitches, but quite a few soccer clubs do not have adequate sports facilities of their own.

Unfortunately, an example is Sion Swifts soccer club, which is based in Sion Mills. It caters for about 300 young people on an ongoing basis, yet it does not have any pitch facilities of its own. In the past, it has used the two pitches at Herdman's Mill, but since the Herdman's project has gone into liquidation, it cannot get insurance cover, and we are left with 300 young people, their coaches and their teams not being able to play in Sion Mills itself.

In Omagh district, some soccer clubs have good facilities, such as Strathroy Harps in Knockmoyle, Tummery Athletic in Dromore, as well as the Beragh Swifts. In Omagh town, there are a number of council-owned pitches, but the old St Julian's pitch for Omagh Town Football Club, which no longer exists, is in a poor state of repair and requires modernisation for health and safety requirements and to make it suitable for playing games on.

We have a very important youth club in Omagh called the Omagh Boys and Girls Club, and £1.2 million was invested there about 10 years ago. Under the leadership of Mr Paddy McMahon and other youth leaders, it has been an excellent club that has provided good, sustainable youth activities for the community and for the youth of the area. In Strabane, we have Melvin Hall which is in the Bridgend, and, over many years, it has been an excellent facility to cater for the needs of the youth and other sports users. It is a busy centre that is bursting at the seams and is well run and managed by Strabane District Council's sports department.

The traditional importance of cricket in the rural areas of west Tyrone cannot be overstated, with some of the older clubs such as Donemana Cricket Club being over 100 years old. Those clubs take part in and have won several competitions including the Irish Senior Cup, the Ulster Cup, the North West Senior League and North West Senior Cup. Notably, Sion Mills Cricket Club hosted Ireland versus the West Indies in 1969, which Ireland won handsomely.

The Herdmans have made a major contribution to the development of cricket in the north-west.

In west Tyrone, like many other parts of the country, people identify themselves by the culture that they celebrate. Culture can be defined as a set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterise an institution, organisation or group. For example, the Tyrone feis, which happens annually, caters for young people from four years old up to 20 years old, allowing them to partake in music, art, drama, poetry and other competitions. They are, in effect, practising what they would consider to be their culture.

We also have the Orange Order, which celebrates its culture through parades and celebrations throughout the year, with the pinnacle of celebration being the 12 July parade. Many excellent pipe bands and other musical marching bands provide good community activities and local pride for their respective communities. We have excellent art centres in both Omagh and Strabane that are catering for the many local amateur dramatic groups that put on plays annually. In Carrickmore we have the Mid-Ulster Drama Festival, which has been going for over 40 years, bringing local and national drama groups to that festival and greatly enhancing the cultural and community activities of Carrickmore and mid-Tyrone. We have the Dún Uladh centre outside Omagh, which is a Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann facility. It is a regional centre of significance and makes a major contribution to hosting scór events and other Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann activities.

Sport and culture are heavily intertwined in west Tyrone, as are culture and tourism. According to the Northern Ireland passenger survey of 2009, cultural tourism figures reached 219,500 in Northern Ireland. That shows the potential of cultural tourism and sport if properly utilised in places such as west Tyrone. In relation to tourism, there is a strong link between cultural activities and tourist attractions to meet the needs of visitors from home and abroad. There are key tourist attractions in west Tyrone, including the An Creagán centre between Omagh and Cookstown; the President Wilson ancestral home near Strabane; Gray's printing works in Strabane town, renowned for its association with the American constitution; and, indeed, the Ulster American Folk Park between Omagh and Strabane. All of those tourist facilities are on the north-west passage route and make an important contribution to the local economy.

Over the past five years, the Ulster American Folk Park has enjoyed between 135,000 and 160,000 visitors per annum. A lot of overseas visitors, including Americans, want to experience the immigration and history links between the old world in Tyrone and the new world of the US. The Ulster American Folk Park was built in the 1970s to accommodate 30,000 visitors. It was the brainchild of Mr Eric Montgomery, who worked so diligently and expertly to get it established. In 2010 there were 145,000 visitors — 10,000 fewer than the previous year, which saw 154,000 visitors. In 2005 there were 134,000 visitors, so the visitor numbers are increasing generally. In the past year at the folk park, 22%, approximately 30,000 of its visitors, came from the Republic, and 11%, that is, 15,000 visitors, came from North America.

I understand from the minutes of a Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) meeting in February 2011 that the folk park put in a bid for £15 million for the following comprehensive spending review period for capital expenditure.

It was refused, but the Ulster American Folk Park is one of the most attractive tourist facilities in Northern Ireland, and I think there is a strong sense in west Tyrone that it deserves a share of some of the capital investment that goes into the overall museums budget.

The strong Irish-American connection and the Scottish-Irish connection are a powerful attraction for modern tourist interests. More capital investment in both the Omagh and Strabane districts for tourist activities could prove very economically sustainable, particularly in terms of job creation. Obviously, the very positive signal about the A5 road should also enable our part of the world to become more attractive as a tourist destination.

Cultural and heritage tourism can be very financially lucrative for local people if a good tourist product is presented and promoted effectively. The connecting facilities of the President Wilson homestead and Gray's printing works offer the potential to have a more viable and sustainable tourist product in the Strabane area, with the right tourism promotion.

The Sion Mills regeneration heritage project also deserves support. There, we have the best example of industrial heritage in buildings and an overall facility that has contributed so much to the economic, social and cultural development of Sion Mills and the surrounding areas. The whole Herdman history and heritage in the north-west has made an enormous contribution to the sporting, social and economic history of our area.

Over the past five years, three capital projects with financial assistance totalling £520,000 have come into west Tyrone. Of 10 capital projects submitted, two applications were unsuccessful and one was withdrawn. The other seven are at the preliminary stage of assessment. I find it interesting that those seven were submitted in 2012, which means that over 50% of all applications were made in the past year. I would like an update on the prospects of those applications over the rest of this spending period.

I will conclude by admiring and acknowledging the enormous contribution that people across our communities have made to promote and develop those three thematic areas in west Tyrone, as well as the enormous efforts of many people, most of them volunteers, who have made an enormous contribution to the social and economic development of Omagh and Strabane. However, the time has come for central government to back the people and local initiatives with grant aid to develop and sustain the growing number of cultural, sporting and tourism initiatives that need to be further developed and enhanced. We cannot rely on past achievements alone. We need further investment now in all three areas to make sure that west Tyrone's tourism, sport and culture are viable, sustainable and growing. Modern economic activity is greatly dependent on selling to visitors a tourist product that will provide local employment and economic activity. We do not have sunshine to attract tourists, but we have a unique tourist product that is based on our people and their rich heritage and culture.

I thank Members for attending the debate and look forward to their support. I again thank the Minister for being present. It is good that she is here, and I hope that she will be able to attend to some of the needs of the people of west Tyrone over the next period. West Tyrone has developed a rich

social capital and capacity through self-help, community activism and sporting prowess at competitive levels, which reflects and represents the energy, commitment and interests of our people. That results in a good community dynamic, which has developed into a social and economic model that can bring benefits and rewards through community well-being.

I end by saying that a lot of work has been done through self-help. Community development in west Tyrone has been extremely good. There has been generous funding in the past from the International Fund for Ireland, the Sports Council for Northern Ireland and other government agencies. We look forward to continued support.

**Mr Buchanan:** I reiterate all that Mr Byrne said and commend him for securing the Adjournment debate. Investment of any type in west Tyrone is always welcomed. It always appears so difficult to get investment into west Tyrone when we look for it. It is so difficult to get Departments and Ministers to listen to the lobbying and the pleas of elected representatives, who say, "Look, the people of west Tyrone need funding, assistance and help." It is so difficult at times to get through to Ministers and Departments and get them to listen to the pleas of the people. That is why I am glad that the issue has been brought to the House this evening.

It always appears that before the financial bus leaves Belfast it is over half empty. It sheds half its load or more before it gets away. It gets the length of Portadown and throws another bit off. It comes to Dungannon and sheds another bit of its load. When it gets our length, we in west Tyrone are left with the crumbs or the pennies, or whatever you like, of investment.

### 7.30 pm

Although we welcome the little droplets that we get — it is always good to get investment into west Tyrone, no matter how small — this evening, we will be like Oliver Twist: we will keep asking for more. Why not? We in west Tyrone deserve the same funding and commitment as every other constituency across Northern Ireland. Our message is simple: we will keep knocking at the door and lobbying until we get the funding that we deserve for all types of activities. When it comes to capital investment, job creation or whatever, it always seems that we are on the back foot in west Tyrone, no matter how much lobbying we do.

The topic has been broken into three aspects: sport, culture and tourism. I will not go into the specific areas that the proposer went into. He named all the different clubs; I will be more general to avoid being repetitive. In the sporting world in west Tyrone, as the proposer said, we have football, rugby, Gaelic football, cricket and hockey. We have many other sporting facilities in west Tyrone. So often, however, they do not receive the required investment to bring them up to the proper standard. Many small clubs throughout the rural areas of west Tyrone that cater for younger people are run by volunteers. The only way that they can be sustained and kept viable is for those volunteers to fundraise in their own communities. We really need more investment in those areas to keep them moving forward. We have good sporting facilities across west Tyrone, but it is about keeping them viable and moving forward. West Tyrone produces some of the greatest sportspeople, whether it be soccer, Gaelic,

cricket or whatever. We have the potential to deliver that, but we need more assistance and funding from central government to move it forward. It is like a car engine trying to move forward. If it is starved of fuel, it will stop. We do not want to stop or go back; we want to move forward. In order to do that in the sporting world in west Tyrone, we need the proper investment.

The proposer mentioned the great diverse cultures, such as the Orange Order and the GAA, that are widely celebrated in west Tyrone. It has one of the greatest cultural heritages in Northern Ireland. Cultural identity is special and unique to the people of west Tyrone. Whether it be in arts, storytelling, music, folklore, creative arts or whatever, it is special to the people there. It is part of the tradition that was handed down through the generations, and it gives the people that sense of identity.

I think of the pipe band scene in west Tyrone. We have pipe bands in nearly every townland. Some small bands are out perhaps only one or two times a year. Others go on to the contest world and the pipe band scene in Scotland, and they win prizes and bring them back to west Tyrone. We are proud of that culture and identity. Again, those are run by many volunteers who keep them moving forward. The majority of the funding comes from community fundraising activities. Some might come from local councils — little bits here and there — but the majority comes from community fundraising. There needs to be a little bit of support from central government.

The proposer said that we have the arts centre in Omagh and the theatre in Strabane. We have other venues throughout west Tyrone. Again, for us to sustain them and keep them moving forward, we need a little bit of investment from central government.

Turning to tourism, although we do not have the lakes of Fermanagh or the coastal areas of north Antrim, we have the hills and valleys that create a picturesque scene. You will not find that picturesque scene anywhere else in Northern Ireland. The Sperrins attract many visitors every year, and, of course, we have the Ulster American Folk Park. The Member mentioned the numbers that go through that park every year. All that is part of the culture and heritage that we find in west Tyrone. We have a tourist attraction that is special and unique to west Tyrone; it is not found anywhere else. So, to keep that alive and moving forward, we need that further investment from central government. I am disappointed to learn that the bid for moneys that the Ulster American Folk Park made has been turned down. I ask the Minister to look at that. Like the Member who spoke previously, I would like some details on the other seven areas that submitted applications, which are somewhere in the pecking order, to see exactly where they are and what assistance can be given to them.

**Mr Principal Deputy Speaker:** I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

**Mr Buchanan:** I trust that the Minister will listen. I thank her for being here, and I look forward to her response.

**Mr McElduff:** Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, agus cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo. I welcome the securing of this Adjournment debate, and I thank Joe Byrne for taking that initiative. The subject of the debate offers plenty of scope to the representatives of West

Tyrone to highlight the many cultural and sporting projects and initiatives in the constituency, as well as the many visitor and tourist attractions that are worthy of highlighting.

I will be specific and zone in on three or four core projects that I feel strongly about. In the first instance and from a sporting point of view, I too express my support for Tyrone GAA's pioneering £6.7 million Garvaghy centre of excellence project. That project is making a real and meaningful contribution to our local economy. So far, around 150 people have been employed on it, including the 34 people who were working on the site last week alone. It is about making future provision for young people to practise and perfect their sport in a modern, fit-for-purpose facility, which to date and in the main has been funded by voluntary contributions from the Gaels of Tyrone. For example, in the very recent past, the family of the late Paul McGirr became the 200th Garvaghy patron. It has been mentioned that there has been some support from local government. However, there is a sense of grievance among the promoters of the project that, hitherto, there has not been any capital injection from the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure or Sport NI. I understand that. The project meets many of the Programme for Government objectives about promoting sport and health, making an economic contribution and recognising cultural value. I also appreciate that the Minister has visited the site and has a good understanding of the amount of voluntary effort that has gone into the project. However, I think that it is reasonable to expect government to make a contribution. That is the point that the promoters are making, and I support it because the centre is one of the biggest sports and cultural projects in the North at this time.

If more money were to become available, I too would make the point that there should be a Places for Sport-type programme. It would be great to get that in place. I feel strongly about that, and I know that the Minister would support it if the money were available. I would support even an equipment grant of the kind that Sport NI typically delivered in the past. However, a lack of resources means that that is not to the fore at this time. Clubs at community level across the different sports deserve central or regional government support when they make considerable efforts and put their hands in their own pockets, so to speak.

I want to mention some of the cultural projects. The Mid-Ulster Drama Festival has been mentioned. Worthy of mention, too, are the drama festivals that take place annually in Newtownstewart and Strabane. However, at the Mid-Ulster Drama Festival in Carrickmore, tonight is the fifth of nine nights of theatre in a row, in the forty-fifth festival. Tonight, it is the turn of the Backburners Drama Circle from Newtownstewart, and their play is 'Closing Time' by Owen McCafferty. Last night, it was 'The Weir' by Conor McPherson, performed by the Pomeroy Players of County Tyrone. You may not know this, Principal Deputy Speaker, but recently I had a walk-on role in a play involving the Pomeroy Players in Begley's Hall, St Mary's Hall, in Pomeroy, as an insurance man. It was great.

There is a great tradition of drama throughout Tyrone, including companies like the Hazel Wand Theatre School. Mention has been made, too, of Dún Uladh and the headquarters of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in Ulster, which is at Ballynamullan, sharing a site with Gaelscoil na gCrann and Killyclogher Gaelic Athletic Club. So there is a lot of cultural and sporting promotion taking place there, on the one site.

I was not going to indulge in mentioning sporting heroes from the area, but I will mention two. One is from the rugby tradition, and his career was cut relatively short. David Pollock, from Omagh, was a leading light in Ulster rugby, but he suffered a bad injury. I will not mention Peter Canavan in this debate, Deputy Principal Speaker; I will not mention Peter Canavan's name. However, I will mention young Tiernan Bradley, who recently won Ulster Herald Sports Personality of the Year at Kelly's Inn, and that was a big occasion for that young boxer and his family.

The Strule Arts Centre and the Alley Arts and Conference Centre in Omagh and Strabane have been mentioned as well, and rightly so. Other venues like The Patrician in Carrickmore and An Creagán Visitor Centre all play their part in promoting culture and the arts, as is Dún Uladh, of course.

It is reasonable and legitimate for people in any constituency, including West Tyrone, to make the point that, when they take the lead in developing facilities, it is reasonable to expect government to support that. In the case of both arts centres in Omagh and Strabane, the Arts Council has been very supportive with capital funding. Maybe the call is now for revenue programmes to support events that will take place in such centres.

On a tourism note, it is good that the Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister is here. I hope that the comments are also read by the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister, Arlene Foster, who has the remit for the promotion of tourism. I think that the Tyrone concept is very strong, particularly on the east coast of America, in places such as New York and Philadelphia. It is a good idea for the Tourist Board to promote the name of Tyrone on the east coast of America, where a lot of our people have taken up residence over the years. I leave it at that.

**Mr Hussey:** I, too, thank Mr Byrne for bringing this subject to the Chamber this evening. Many years ago, Jimmy Young, when doing a parody of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, said, "Welcome to Northern Ireland: the glens of Antrim and the Giant's Causeway, the glens of Antrim and the Giant's Causeway, the glens of Antrim and the Giant's Causeway", as though the world ended with those two places. He obviously did not know that Tyrone existed, and there are times when I believe that some people still believe that Tyrone does not exist.

I have the honour of being the vice chairman of Omagh District Council. My colleague Councillor Buchanan also serves on Omagh District Council, and Mr Byrne and Mr McElduff are former members. Michaela is a former member of Strabane District Council. So we have associations with the councils, and the two district councils in west Tyrone deserve credit for the work they have undertaken in helping the sporting and cultural life of west Tyrone.

#### 7.45 pm

I want to put in an objection to Mr McElduff's comments. He played an insurance man in a play in Pomeroy. I was an insurance man for 26 years and was not asked to take that role. I could have given him guidance and support, but he did not seek it. It is too late now, Mr McElduff. Your time has come and gone. Had you spoken to me beforehand, you could be a star today. Now look where you are.

The subject of the debate is investment in sporting, cultural and tourism-related projects. If you take just those three words — sport, culture and tourism — the village of Sion Mills hits all three. Sion Mills has the rich tradition of the mill and the culture of the people who worked there, its sporting background in soccer, cricket and bowling and the tourism impact of its facilities. That is just one small part of Tyrone.

Mr Byrne, Mr Buchanan and Mr McElduff referred to the strong cultural identity in west Tyrone, whether that be from a GAA or a Tyrone tradition. One thing in Tyrone that binds us all together is the fact that we are from Tyrone. It means something to us and always will.

I read some background information on the west Tyrone area and our sporting heroes, cultural background and tourist attractions. Mr Byrne referred to quite a few of them, as did Mr McElduff and Mr Buchanan. However, when you look at what we actually have, it opens your eyes to what local people are doing, which is all down to volunteers and individuals. In bowling, there is William Boggs, an Ardstraw bowling club member who won the triple event in the mid-Tyrone zone and triumphed in the first all-Ireland under-25 tournament held at St Anthony's Club, Craigavon, in 2011, beating a number of seasoned internationals. In football, there is the Brendan Keogh youth league. The 2012 season, which will be its 14th, begins at the end of March and looks as though it will be one of the biggest yet, with four clubs, Beragh Swifts, Fintona Swifts, Strabane Athletic and a club from Fermanagh and South Tyrone called Augher Stars. I will include that club anyway; I am not proud, and they are from Tyrone as well.

Omagh Academy, my old school, won the Northern Bank schools trophy for the first time in 2012. Mr Byrne referred to Jackie Reid. He was my PE teacher, so please do not look at me and think what a success he had with me. I am afraid that I was one of his failures, but he did try. I used to babysit for him, which is why I got away with a lot of things.

The Omagh Wheelers cycling club was formed in 1999. That club continually lobbies local councillors and MLAs to support it. Reference was also made to Micaela Brunton and Frances Campbell in netball. There is the Ecclesville Centre in Fintona. Councillor Rainey would never forgive me if I did not mention the Ecclesville Centre in Fintona. So there, it got two mentions.

In boxing, Tiernan Bradley was mentioned. The Sacred Heart boxing club fighter registered an amazing treble in 2011, claiming the Ulster and all-Ireland boys' 52 kg titles as well as the Irish junior cadets' title. Later in the year, he also claimed bronze at the European schoolboy boxing championships.

My brother Derek would not forgive me if I did not mention Castlederg High School. In football, there is Strathroy Harps and Dunbreen Rovers in Omagh, which is coming up for 50 years. The sad reality is that, despite many attempts, it still does not have a home. It has had various temporary homes over the years but still has not got a home.

In boxing, we have Nathan Duncan. The Drumragh Integrated College student won the 75 kg schoolboys' middleweight Ulster boxing championship this month. He trains with the Immaculata boxing club in Strabane. In hockey, there is Shirley McCay. There is also the Omagh Lawn Tennis Club: again, a club that started very small and built itself up.



When we look at leisure facilities, we can see that Omagh District Council has invested millions of pounds in its leisure centre. The same can be said of Strabane District Council in respect of the facilities provided in Strabane, and the Derg Valley Leisure Centre is another example of that.

As for culture and tourism, we have the Ulster American Folk Park. How could anyone not fund the Ulster American Folk Park? It celebrates the biggest link between Ireland and America. People will come in their droves because of what is there. It is a marvellous facility. Again, we can remember it starting in the Mellon homestead many years ago. Look where it is today. That is down to hard work and commitment. I also had the honour, as vice chairman of the council, of attending various events there. The Bluegrass Music Festival attracts hundreds and thousands of people into Omagh, County Tyrone.

I sit on the committee of the Strule Arts Centre, and many people who come to it cannot understand how we have such a great facility in Omagh. We are not a total backwoods. We are there, and we are there to be seen.

Time has nearly got the better of me, but one place that I have not mentioned is the St Lucia complex, the military barracks in the centre of Omagh. That is a brilliant opportunity to share our military past. An awful lot of people from the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions joined the army in Omagh at the St Lucia Barracks. I always say that it is one of the finest examples of a military barracks of that era, probably in the whole British empire. Omagh District Council has its eye on it, and it is still there in the melting pot. I would love to see it brought into public ownership.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, you are looking at the clock, so to save you telling me to sit down and be quiet, I will stop now. As Mr McElduff would say, "Come on, Tyrone".

**Ms Boyle:** Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

I too thank the Member who brought the debate to the House for allowing me the opportunity to speak to the House on some of the sporting, cultural and tourism initiatives that the Minister's Department has provided much-needed revenue and funding for in the Strabane district and further afield west of the Bann. I appreciate the Minister being here.

First, I want to talk about some of the tourism initiatives. I appreciate that some of the tourism initiatives are cross-departmental with DETI, and I am keen to hear from the Minister whether she, along with the ETI Minister, would start the discussion on some of the west Tyrone initiatives, both sporting and tourism, that Members have spoken about today. Those are projects that the Minister could raise at the next North/South Ministerial Council meeting on tourism.

Strabane has one of the most prestigious canals that you will see anywhere in Ireland or Europe. Our canal opened in 1796. It is 306 years old, and it closed in 1962. It is a four-mile stretch of the River Foyle, starting from the River Mourne. Its purpose when it opened was to encourage industrial and commercial cargo upstream from Strabane to Derry. As Strabane at that time was a flourishing market town, it brought considerable prosperity to Strabane and its hinterlands. Other Members referred to Gray's Printing Press earlier and the ancestral home of President Woodrow Wilson. The canal has been restored but not quite to its

former glory, but as close to that as the funding would permit. It has two locks: Devlin's lock and Crampsie's lock. They are now working, and hopefully the canal will be opened once again to the public so that it can be used for enjoyable activities, such as walking, cycling, boating, gaming and angling. I am sure that, when the canal opens, hopefully in June, it will attract visitors from far and wide who will come to share with us in Strabane this jewel in the crown. I thank the Minister along with the council and her Department for their efforts in bringing that to fruition. I am sure that you are aware that these projects attract tourists to the town and, indeed, west of the Bann. Events such as the one on the canal can stretch the budget. We need finance to keep it up. I urge the Minister to find the much-needed and deserved funds for such projects.

We also have some great loughs in Strabane, such as Lough Ash, Lough Lee and Moorlough. Moorlough sits right in the heart of the Sperrins. There is beautiful scenery right along the lough. Minister, your Department has part responsibility for Moorlough. It is well stocked with brown and rainbow trout and covers some 16.2 hectares. Many visitors are attracted to that lough, where they enjoy a game of fishing or a great family day out. Such are the amenities at Moorlough that there is little or no access to it, only a stony road. There is a toilet block that needs repaired annually, and the parking facilities are inadequate. Minister, as it is the part responsibility of your Department, I encourage you to find the funding that is needed in that area. When we had the great weather over the weekend, Moorlough was bustling with tourists — and I mean tourists, not people from Strabane. There were people from Antrim there on Sunday. It is a joy to be had by everyone. Minister, you are welcome to Strabane to visit the many tourist attractions.

We mentioned the Alley Theatre in Strabane and the Strule Arts Centre in Omagh. We are very proud of our arts in west Tyrone. The Member mentioned the dramas that have taken place at the Strule Arts Centre. At the Alley Theatre, we have had another successful year of pantomimes and dramas. We have a range of performing arts, visual arts, literature and crafts. All of these smaller projects cannot be forgotten about. Unfortunately, when some of the smaller groups that run and host these events apply for grants, they do not fit the eligibility criteria. As was mentioned, most of the people involved in the drama groups give up their free time because they are passionate about what they do. They ensure that the public get to see the natural talent that we have in west Tyrone.

I will speak now about some of the sporting events in Strabane and further afield in west Tyrone. Strabane is the birthplace of Dr George Sigerson. He was born in Holy Hill in 1836. Our local Gaelic club is named after the esteemed Dr George Sigerson, and I declare an interest as a member of that club. The club has excellent minor and senior teams for girls and boys, which are going from strength to strength. Minister, your Department was recently instrumental in securing funding for an outside trail alongside the club that sits well in the heart of the community, not just for club members but for the community to use.

Throughout west Tyrone and Strabane, we have excellent facilities for boxing, basketball, hockey and camogie. We have an excellent hockey team in Castledearg. Ladies' games, particularly camogie and hockey, are under-represented and do not get the financial support that Gaelic, rugby and football do. Minister, I urge you and your Department to do more

to promote women's sport and games. Women contribute greatly to sport, and that is often forgotten about. Speaking of hockey, I am sure that the Minister will join me in sending our best wishes to the Ireland women's hockey team. Their Olympic qualification dreams were dashed when they lost 4-1 to Belgium at the weekend.

I also want to mention the Irish language in west Tyrone, particularly in my home town of Strabane. Recently, Gaelphobal won the all-Ireland Glór na nGael competition for its contribution to the Irish language.

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

**Ms Boyle:** I also want to mention the centre of excellence at Garvaghy. Further investment is needed in the promotion and development of Gaelic games in that area.

Lastly, I will take the opportunity to thank the Minister and her Department for their continued support for many projects west of the Bann.

#### 8.00 pm

**Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):**

Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank Joe Byrne for proposing the Adjournment topic. I also thank Thomas Buchanan, Barry McElduff, Ross Hussey and Michaela Boyle for setting the scene for west Tyrone.

I am a city girl. I come from north Belfast, but, since I took up office last May, I have been in west Tyrone, and, from what I have seen, the range of activities that happen in that constituency cover a lot of different aspects of sport and culture. I have a briefing in front of me, but I have seen it myself. Indeed, it has quite a lot to offer.

I want to pick up on some of the comments that were made. I am aware that the constituency of West Tyrone is a largely rural area, but there are a number of urban centres. The main centres are Strabane and Omagh, which, as Members mentioned, were traditionally market towns. Indeed, both towns and the rest of the constituency are rich in their cultural heritage.

I am aware of the unemployment figures for the constituency. Some 23% of the population of West Tyrone live in some of the most deprived areas. I will take up some of the points that Thomas made. The Executive, through the latest Programme for Government, have again demonstrated that resources need to be directed towards need. The 23% of the population that is deprived covers not only areas of unemployment, but poor housing, educational attainment, health and all the rest, but youse already know all this.

I am concerned about the number of young people who are leaving our shores to go to America, and, mainly, Australia to try to find work. That issue has been raised before, and it is totally unacceptable to us all.

Joe Byrne talked about the lack of investment in west Tyrone, and Thomas Buchanan also picked up on it. I want to put on the record that, in my view, the west of the Bann has not received the investment that it should have received. It is recognised for all sorts of reasons that people living west of the Bann did not get the investment that they were entitled to, compared with people living east of the Bann.

We need to make sure that that lack of investment is a thing of the past.

On 14 February, which, coincidentally, was Valentine's Day, I, and many other Members were glad that £330 million was committed to the upgrade of two sections of the A5 road between Derry and Strabane and Omagh and Ballygawley. That was well overdue. Some £25.7 million was committed to accelerate the progress of construction work on the new Omagh local hospital. Again, that is in addition to the £75 million that was announced in August last year. I am just pointing out the recent investment that was made. We need to make sure that that trend continues.

DCAL has invested a lot of capital funding in local sport and cultural and tourism infrastructure. We have invested in museums, sports venues, theatres and visitor attractions. Capital investment is really important for local people. They need to see a value put on their constituencies. As Barry and others pointed out, local capital investment will mean local jobs, particularly in the construction sector, which has been hard hit, particularly west of the Bann.

Members mentioned the excellent facilities in their constituencies, particularly Strule Arts Centre in Omagh and the Alley Arts Centre in Strabane. However, others were mentioned. I am surprised that nobody mentioned the Fintona tram, but I will touch on that later. Despite some of the comments that were made, the Ulster American Folk Park received £2.4 million.

I hear what you are saying about it not being enough, but £2.4 million has been invested in a feature that is ranked eighth most popular visitor attraction in the North, with some 167,000 visitors. I think that that is quite good. We need to go in and support that.

In the past five financial years, Sport NI has provided funding towards 31 projects in west Tyrone, totalling £2.3 million. However, I hear what people are saying. One of the real issues that has been raised relates to the Garvaghy project. I went to the Garvaghy project something like two days before Christmas, and I saw at first-hand the centre, the site and the progress that has been made. I have to say again, as a girl from north Belfast, which has no pitches for its kids, I was really impressed with what County Tyrone has done for its citizens. I was really impressed with the young people. My understanding is that Sport NI will be making a decision soon — in May or June — on the contribution, and we all look forward to that.

I want to refer to some of the comments that Members made. If you do not mind, lads, I will take the last point first, because Michaela had the last word. She mentioned women in sport. I am sure the House would like to pass on its commiserations, but also its pride, to Ireland's women's hockey team that narrowly lost out. They have our best wishes, and I am sure they will be back again. Women are involved in sport, particularly in west Tyrone. A lot of sporting activity occurs, and a lot of women are involved, but that recognition needs to be reflected in investment. I recognised that in December last year, when I put on an event to recognise the value of women in sport. The volunteers who are involved in sporting, cultural and tourism activities in west Tyrone, whom Members have mentioned, are to be valued but not taken for granted. I hear what you are saying. We need to support the contribution that people make on

a voluntary basis by not taking them for granted and by making sure that they are invested in and recognised.

Michaela also mentioned the loughs. I am glad that people from north Antrim are going to west Tyrone. As a girl from north Belfast, I will be in west Tyrone again. The Member mentioned Lough Ash, Lough Lee, Moirlough and Lough Bradan and said that they were stocked with brown and rainbow trout. That will help in respect of tourism. Setting aside the recent developments around salmon and so forth, angling in our rivers and waterways, particularly in small rural villages and towns, is essential. We need to do what we can to support that.

I recognise the value that local government has made through its contribution, particularly around Garvaghy, but when listening to some of the Members talk today, you would think that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) was not involved. DARD made a contribution to Garvaghy as well, so central government have made a contribution. I think the question should be this: what is DCAL going to do? We think that we need to at least recognise that. The question is about DCAL, not government in general. The funds that local government has put into that project, tourism and other sporting and cultural projects have to be widely recognised.

Some of the arm's-length bodies from my Department have matched some of those contributions through Sport NI, the Arts Council and museums. Recently, we went through the review of libraries. This is where I want to mention the Fintona tram and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Fintona tram is very important. I did not realise that, but I realise it now. The question I keep getting asked by none other than Barry McElduff — but not solely him — is whether we can —

**Mr Hussey:** He remembers the Fintona tram.

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I did not want to mention that, but you did, so that is on the record. I will not dispute it; I would not dare intervene in a local row.

I recognise that we need to bring some of our artefacts out of the museums and put them into our towns and villages. We need to exhibit those things to help tourism. We need to try to join aspects of the DCAL family with our local government to try to make sure that we do everything that we can. I do not know whether we are there yet; that is the honest answer.

I will certainly check the Hansard report of today's debate, and I am confident that my Executive colleagues will do likewise. I have had contributions in preparation for this debate from the Social Development Minister, Nelson McCausland, and from the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster. Those contributions related to neighbourhood renewal, because of the deprivation, tourism and, primarily, investment. We have also had contributions from the Health Department. We need to have a more joined-up approach to make sure that the purpose of the debate is achieved. It is about culture, tourism and sport. We need to link up to make sure that we provide the best possible facilities and services for the people of west Tyrone.

This is my first adjournment debate, and I am delighted that it has been about west Tyrone. I hope that the announcements that should be made by Sport NI and others regarding facilities

in that constituency will be made and will be successful. I also hope to be back again. I was at Omagh District Council offices recently for the launch of Líofo. I was very well received, and I was really impressed. I know that the Ulster-Scots Agency has done excellent work along with Foras na Gaeilge, and the Orange Order and the GAA have done loads of work. A lot has been done and more needs to be done, and I look forward to playing my role in that.

*Adjourned at 8.10 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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# Written Ministerial Statements

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## Health, Social Services and Public Safety

### Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Surgery Services

*Published on Thursday 29 March, 2012*

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** I wish to make a statement to the Assembly following notification from the HSC Board that it plans to carry out an external review of paediatric congenital cardiac Services.

I am advised by the HSC Board that it plans to commission an external review of the paediatric congenital cardiac service in Belfast. Paediatric congenital cardiac surgery is a highly complex specialist service which carries a significant risk. Congenital cardiac disease is a rare condition. Currently the service in Belfast is provided by a highly skilled and dedicated team including surgeons, cardiologists and nurses.

We recognise that such a highly complex specialist service is inherently vulnerable mainly because of the low activity levels. As a result there are significant challenges in attaining and sustaining quality against rising standards. Standards for this service are increasing across the UK with a move towards surgeons working in larger teams delivering higher volumes of activity. Available evidence and professional consensus is that larger teams deliver better outcomes. In light of these increasing standards we need to consider how we deliver the best service for children in Northern Ireland.

The external review to be commissioned by the Board will consider the current service provision, activity, outcomes and sustainability of the paediatric congenital cardiac service and will provide assurance on the quality of services for patients in Northern Ireland

It is important to recognise that in such a highly complex specialty, not all children will survive. Across the UK, there is a mechanism in place where surgical outcomes are reported to the Central Cardiac Audit Database (CCAD). This enables health professionals to continually measure and improve care by comparing their work to specific standards and national trends.

The CCAD report for the period 2007-2010 indicated a higher than expected mortality for one particular procedure, undertaken at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, on children suffering from a disorder known as Tetralogy of Fallot, which is a serious heart abnormality. The Trust

took appropriate and proportionate action by suspending Tetralogy Repair when the CCAD data was made available in September 2011.

I understand that in the context of the CCAD report for 2007-2010 and following validation of the outcomes and an internal review, the Belfast Trust also plans to seek a more detailed review into the outcomes during that period. The Trust has confirmed that it will invite the Royal College of Surgeons to conduct a review of those outcomes as advised by the Society of Cardio Thoracic Surgeons and the British Congenital Cardiac Association. It is entirely appropriate that the Trust would wish to take a more in-depth look at the higher than expected mortality for that procedure during that period.

The Belfast Trust review will be carried forward in addition to the HSC Board's external review of the wider paediatric congenital cardiac service.

I am conscious parents of children suffering from congenital cardiac problems may be anxious about these reviews. It is important to remember that the CCAD report has highlighted one procedure out of over 30 cardiac surgical procedures carried out on children across the UK. This procedure is currently not being carried out here and any children who need this surgery are being referred to other centres.

I wish to reassure families that the Board and the Trust are acting appropriately to ensure the provision of high quality, safe services for these children.

The Belfast Trust has established an advice line for any parent who is concerned. Free phone 0800 9178226. This advice line will be staffed from 5.00pm this afternoon (29th March) until 9.00pm this evening and again from 8.00am to 6.00pm tomorrow (30th March).

## **Pseudomonas Incidents in Neonatal Units**

*Published on Wednesday 4 April 2012*

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** I wish to make a statement to the Assembly about the publication of the Interim Report of the Independent Review of Incidents of Pseudomonas aeruginosa Infection in Neonatal Units in Northern Ireland.

I will begin by expressing again my condolences to the families who suffered the loss of their baby.

I also want to thank the families who have contributed to this review so far. The death of a baby is devastating for their parents and the wider family circle. The suffering of a baby who has contracted a potentially life-threatening infection is heart-rending and the anguish of their families is unspeakable. To relive these events so others may never have to suffer the same must have been incredibly difficult but it was selfless and hugely courageous.

I want to acknowledge also that this has been a difficult time for the staff who have been involved.

On 31 January, I made a statement to the Assembly to update Members on the pseudomonas incidents in neonatal units. I said then that I had asked the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) to facilitate an independent review of these incidents, and that I had asked for an interim report by end of March so that urgent actions could be taken.

Professor Pat Troop has led the review. On 30 March she presented the interim report to my Department.

The interim report focuses on the first two Terms of Reference of the review. These were: (1) to investigate the circumstances contributing to the occurrences of pseudomonas infection in neonatal units from 1 November 2011, and (2) to review the effectiveness of the Trusts' management of the occurrences of pseudomonas infection and colonisation within neonatal units.

The Interim Report is being published today, 4 April, on the RQIA's website: [www.rqia.org.uk](http://www.rqia.org.uk). The report is also being placed in the Assembly Library.

The report is concise and is written with the lay reader in mind. I would encourage Members to read the report fully and closely.

The Interim Report contains 15 recommendations (Annex A). A number of these can be implemented immediately, and will be. I have asked my Department to develop an action plan with a timetable for taking forward those recommendations that require a significant lead-in time or investment.

I want to thank Professor Troop and the review team for completing this phase of the review within the timeframe that I set, and for the clarity of their report.

The Review will now focus on the third and fourth Terms of Reference. These are: (3) to review the effectiveness of the governance arrangements across all five Health and Social Care Trusts with regard to the arrangements for the prevention and control of infection and all other relevant issues in the respective neonatal units, and (4) to review the effectiveness of the communication between the DHSSPS, the HSCB, the PHA and the five Health and Social Care Trusts in respect of all relevant information and

communications on the pseudomonas bacterium. I have asked to receive the final report by 31 May 2012.

The Review team has made it clear that it is keen to hear from the families who have not yet accepted their invitation to engage with them.

I am grateful to the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee for agreeing to meet during the Easter recess to hear directly from Professor Troop and the Review Team. They will be able to explain more fully the significance of their findings through response to the questions that Members will want to ask.

I want to underline that I am determined to ensure that the lessons from this Interim Report and the forthcoming Final Report are applied diligently and effectively across all relevant parts of the HSC which is clearly the only appropriate response to the tragic events that led to this Review. I will report further to the Assembly at that stage.

We must not forget that at the centre of this matter are families who have been bereaved through these tragic events, as well as many more families who have been through great anxiety. We owe it to these families to do everything we can to prevent such tragedies and incidents from happening again.

### **Annex A Recommendations**

1. The current interim guidance that sterile water should be used when washing all babies in neonatal care (Levels 1, 2 and 3) should be continued pending early consideration of the Department of Health (England) guidance issued on 30 March 2012.
2. Tap water should not be used in maternity and neonatal units during the process of defrosting frozen breast milk.
3. The current arrangements for testing water in neonatal units in Northern Ireland for pseudomonas should be continued pending early consideration of the Department of Health (England) guidance issued on 30 March 2012. This guidance sets out recommendations for water testing for all augmented care units including neonatal care.
4. The presentation of test results of water samples should be standardised across the laboratories which undertake this for HSC organisations.
5. The review team recommends that guidance on cleaning sinks should be reviewed so that practice is standardised across all clinical areas.
6. Regional guidance on the cleaning of incubators and other specialist equipment for neonatal care should be produced.
7. Independent validation of hand hygiene audits should be carried out on a regular basis, supported by robust action plans where issues of non-compliance are identified.
8. The intensive care accommodation in the neonatal unit at Antrim Area Hospital should be expanded to allow more circulation space around cots.



9. *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* should be identified as an alert organism for neonatal intensive and high dependency care. When identified from a sample from a baby, taps and sinks should be tested in rooms which had been occupied by that baby since birth.
10. Surveillance arrangements should be established for *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* for augmented care settings including neonatal care.
11. All relevant organisations should work to an agreed regional protocol for the declaration of outbreaks.
12. Arrangements for the typing of strains of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* should be established in Northern Ireland.
13. A regional neonatal network should be formally established in Northern Ireland.
14. The hours of availability for the regional transfer service for neonates should be expanded with plans put in place to move to a 24 hour service.
15. The development of the new Regional Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Royal Jubilee Maternity Service should be expedited as soon as possible. In the interim period, improved accommodation for the purposes of isolation and for the cleaning of equipment should be made available for the current unit. Steps to improve the space around each cot should be considered.

## Regional Development

### Regional Development Strategy 2035

*Published at 12:00 noon on  
Thursday 15 March, 2012*

**Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):** I am pleased to inform Assembly members of the publication of the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 on 15 March 2012.

As the spatial strategy of the Executive the RDS informs and supports the PFG, Budget decisions and the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland. It provides an overarching strategic planning framework to facilitate and guide both the public and private sectors.

The RDS 2035 addresses key challenges on rebuilding and rebalancing the economy, population growth, the location of jobs and houses, infrastructure provision, climate change and the protection of our natural and built environment.

The document and associated Impact Assessments are available on the Internet at [www.drdni.gov.uk/RDS2035](http://www.drdni.gov.uk/RDS2035) and in the Assembly Library. However if any member would prefer a personal hard copy, it can be obtained by contacting Jackie King on (028) 90540669.

### Roads Service

*Published at 12:00 noon on  
Thursday 15 March, 2012*

**Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):** In recent months, the relationship between Roads Service and the rest of my Department has been subject to review. As a result, I have agreed that Roads Service, in line with a number of other public sector organisations, will cease to be an Executive Agency within the Department from 1 April 2012.

Roads Service will retain its branding and continue to deliver the same services as before, but as a business area within the Department rather than as an agency. This is largely an administrative change and will have no impact on the daily work of the majority of staff.

**Transport: A New Approach to Regional Transportation**

*Published at 10:00 am on  
Tuesday 27 March, 2012*

**Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):** I am pleased to inform Assembly members that Ensuring a Sustainable Transport Future: A New Approach to Regional Transportation will be published on 28 March 2011.

The current Regional Transportation Strategy 2002-12 was successful in securing high levels of public funding to improve our transportation infrastructure. However, the speed and direction of change in society prompted the need for review. The increase in population and vehicles has placed significant pressures on our transportation networks coupled with fiscal constraints and the need to reduce our environmental impacts.

Ensuring a Sustainable Transport Future: A New Approach to Regional Transportation will build on what has been achieved. It emphasises the need to concentrate on moving people rather than vehicles, creating space on the networks for people and also for freight and on maintaining what is in place and using it in a smarter way.

The New Approach is different from the current strategy in that it is not constructed on schemes and projects. Rather it sets the High Level Aims and Strategic Objectives for transportation in Northern Ireland that form the basis for future decision-making on my Department's transportation funding priorities.

The High Level Aims and Strategic Objectives are:

- A. Support the Growth of the Economy
  - 1: Improve connectivity within the region
  - 2: Use road space and railways more efficiently
  - 3: Better maintain transport infrastructure
  - 4: Improve access in our towns and cities
  - 5: Improve access in rural areas
  - 6: Improve connections to key tourism sites
- B. Enhance the quality of life for all
  - 7: Improve Safety
  - 8: Enhance Social Inclusion
  - 9: Develop transport programmes focussed on the user
- C. Reduce the Environmental Impact of Transport
  - 10: Reduce Greenhouse gas emissions from transport
  - 11: Protect biodiversity
  - 12: Reduce water, noise and air pollution

My Department will continue to engage with other departments in working through the process and in developing a draft Delivery Plan which I will bring to the Executive for endorsement.

Copies of the document are available in the Assembly Library. The document and associated Impact Assessments are also available on the Department's website [www.drdni.gov.uk/](http://www.drdni.gov.uk/) or by contacting:

Shane Milligan  
Strategic Policy and Coordination Division  
3rd Floor, Clarence Court, 10-18 Adelaide Street,  
Belfast, BT2 8GB

Email: [newapproach@drdni.gov.uk]  
Telephone: 028 90540580  
Textphone: 028 90540642

# 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 16 March 2012

## Written Answers to Questions

### Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

#### Childcare Strategy: Timescale

**Mr Agnew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the timescale for the publication of the draft Childcare Strategy. (AQW 7218/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister):** We intend to carry out a public consultation later in the year on our proposals for a Strategy to promote the availability of good quality, accessible, integrated and affordable childcare provision.

#### Equality Unit

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in their Department's Equality Unit.

(AQW 7654/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The OFMDFM Equality and Human Rights Unit currently employs five members of staff:

The total annual staff cost for the Unit is £212,238.

#### Childcare Strategy: Update

**Mr Lyttle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of a Childcare Strategy. (AQO 1216/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We are leading on the development of a Childcare Strategy in support of the draft Programme for Government action to implement a strategy for integrated and affordable childcare. This action requires co-operation and joint working across departments and agencies.

In December 2011, the first meeting of a high level working group, the Childcare Strategy Group, was convened. This Working Group is chaired by a senior OFMDFM official and comprises senior officials from key departments involved in childcare provision. Two further meetings of the Working Group were held in January.

The work of this Group will take account of the views of stakeholders, as well as other relevant information and research, and will put forward proposals to us on the development of the Childcare Strategy.

The intention is to carry out a public consultation later in the year on proposals for a Strategy to promote the availability of good quality, accessible, integrated and affordable childcare provision.

The Executive has allocated additional funding of £12 million across the Comprehensive Spending Review Period to support the development of the Childcare Strategy. This funding will not replace existing baseline provision for the delivery of childcare services.

#### Older People: Public Services

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they ensure that older people are aware of all the public services available to improve their quality of life; and how much funding has been allocated for this purpose in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8154/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We appointed Dame Joan Harbison as Older People's Advocate from December 2008 until December 2011. Dame Joan Harbison worked closely with the age sector and departments and highlighted the importance of reaching out to older people to ensure they are aware of what they are entitled to. She also attended many meetings with older people and used her regular newsletters to advise older people on the services available to help them.

In November 2011, we appointed Claire Keatinge as the Commissioner for Older People. The Commissioner will encourage best practice in the treatment of older people and has advised the Department on the most appropriate methodologies to reach older people who are difficult to contact.

The Department also engages regularly with organisations representing the interests and rights of older people, including Age NI and the Age Sector Platform, and Executive Ministers support the work of the Pensioners Parliament.

### **Conferences, Away-days and Team-building Exercises: OFMDFM Spend**

**Mr Weir** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much their Department has spent on conferences, awaydays and team-building exercises in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 8190/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** OFMDFM expenditure on conference fees in each of the last three financial years is set out below:

|         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 2008-09 | £49,580 |
| 2009-10 | £62,510 |
| 2010-11 | £25,075 |

It is not possible to provide details of costs of away-days and team-building exercises as these are not separately recorded in the financial accounting systems.

### **Landslide: Marlborough Terrace, Londonderry**

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why there has been marked disparity in terms of a co-ordinated response to the landslide incident in the Marlborough Terrace area of Londonderry in December 2011 and the inaction over the similar landslide in the Linen Fields development, Banbridge in January 2010.

**(AQW 8201/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Policy and operational involvement for these incidents rests with the Minister of the Environment and the Minister for Regional Development and therefore are outside the remit of OFMDFM.

### **Postage and Printing Costs**

**Mr McKay** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department, and its arm's-length bodies, give elected representatives the choice of receiving reports and all other correspondence by email to minimise postage and printing costs.

**(AQW 8492/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Our Department will provide electronic responses to correspondence from Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) when requested by them to do so. MLAs are normally advised of the publication of reports by our Department or its Arms Length Bodies by means of a letter of notification which will allow them to access the publication on the relevant website. Communication in relation to Ministerial Statements is carried out in accordance with the requirements of Assembly Standing Orders which require written copies of Oral Statements to be made available to each MLA.

### **Economic Advice**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, for each of the last three years, to detail the organisations that have provided economic advice to their Department; and the cost of the advice.

**(AQW 8622/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Departmental Economists are the primary source of economic advice to Departments in support of investment appraisal, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. A number of these professional economists are employed within the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to undertake this work. The cost of this advice over the last three years amounts to £580,284 which includes basic salary, employer national insurance contributions and pension contributions.

Economic advice has also been provided by the Strategic Investment Board. Where additional external economic advice is sought, this is available from a range of sources. These include centres of academic expertise (for example in the universities), research institutes, think tanks, research councils as well as independent researchers. These sources have the potential to offer independent specialist expertise as well as sufficient flexibility to address new and emerging policy issues. Within the last three years, Oxford Economics and the Economic & Social Research Institute have provided advice on a number of occasions with total fees of less than £140,000.

## Crossmaglen Republican Monument

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps have been taken in relation to the decision, by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that the Crossmaglen republican monument is eligible for funding under Measure 3.6 of the Rural Development Programme; and the results of any such steps.

**(AQW 8722/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** OFMDFM does not have responsibility for the Rural Development Programme. Decisions on funding under that Programme are the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

## Strategic Support Fund

**Mr Elliott** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the level of funding allocated to groups working with victims and survivors under the 2011/2012 Strategic Support Fund (a) in total; and (b) broken down by each group to date; and (ii) the level of funding allocated in the in-year monitoring rounds.

**(AQW 8887/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The information requested for (i) is set out in the table attached.

There was no funding allocated in the in year monitoring rounds.

### SSF Payments 2011/2012

| Group                     | Total funding allocated |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Aisling                   | £ 66,910.81             |
| Antrim Counselling        | £ 32,204.00             |
| Ashton Centre             | £ 456,889.20            |
| Aurora Counselling        | £ 87,406.00             |
| Calms                     | £ 155,794.08            |
| Colin Community           | £ 75,167.71             |
| Columba Hse               | £ 69,954.76             |
| Contact Youth             | £ 59,084.48             |
| Corpus Christie           | £ 162,847.64            |
| Cunamh                    | £ 176,659.00            |
| Derrywell Woman           | £ 90,955.22             |
| Ely                       | £ 214,247.62            |
| Ex Service Mental Welfare | £ 81,642.00             |
| Families Beyone Conflict  | £ 53,599.81             |
| Families Moving on        | £ 111,844.98            |
| Firinne                   | £ 153,647.82            |
| HAVEN                     | £ 67,366.00             |
| HELP NI                   | £ 75,576.13             |
| Holy Trinity              | £ 45,266.93             |
| HURT                      | £ 119,816.45            |
| Koram                     | £ 160,653.23            |
| Lenadoon C S              | £ 78,065.07             |
| Mast                      | £ 77,982.90             |
| New Life Counselling      | £ 185,706.42            |
| NI Centre T T             | £ 271,675.50            |
| Niamh                     | £ 89,001.00             |

| <b>Group</b>         | <b>Total funding allocated</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| NIMT                 | £ 78,925.88                    |
| NOVA                 | £ 126,368.00                   |
| OSSHG                | £ 136,861.94                   |
| Pat Finucane         | £ 24,925.00                    |
| Peace Factory        | £ 84,306.20                    |
| Raft                 | £ 108,768.97                   |
| React                | £ 45,050.00                    |
| Regimental Assoc UDR | £ 55,143.83                    |
| RFJ                  | £ 579,768.16                   |
| SDAHW                | £ 111,847.29                   |
| SEFF                 | £ 225,651.46                   |
| Springhill           | £ 94,927.22                    |
| Survivors of Trauma  | £ 147,414.40                   |
| TARA                 | £ 138,697.20                   |
| VAST                 | £ 137,312.88                   |
| WAVE                 | £ 1,207,940.04                 |
| West Tyrone Voice    | £ 112,235.04                   |
| Wider Circle         | £ 90,904.21                    |
| Total                | £ 6,727,012.48                 |

### Strategic Support Fund

**Mr Elliott** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of funded posts for each group that is in receipt of Strategic Support Fund monies, broken down by constituency.

**(AQW 8888/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** A total of 101 full-time and 56 part-time posts are funded across 44 groups.

A breakdown by constituency is not available; however, a breakdown by District Council is set out below.

|                                | <b>Council /Group</b>                         | <b>F/T Posts</b> | <b>P/T posts</b> |
|--------------------------------|---|------------------|------------------|
| Antrim Borough Council         | Antrim Youth Information & Counselling centre | 0                | 2                |
| Armagh City & District Council | Restorative Action Following on The Troubles  | 1                | 1                |
|                                | REACT   | 1                | 1                |
| Banbridge District Council     | South Down Action for Healing Wounds          | 1                | 1                |



|  | <b>Council /Group</b>                                 | <b>F/T Posts</b> | <b>P/T posts</b> |
|--|---|------------------|------------------|
| Belfast City Council                       | Haven Victim Support Group                            | 1                | 1                |
|  | Springhill Community House                            | 1                | 2                |
|  | Families Beyond Conflict                              | 1                | 0                |
|  | Survivors of Trauma                                   | 3                | 3                |
|  | Niamh (Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health | 1                | 0                |
|  | Wider Circle  | 2                | 0                |
|  | New Life Counselling Service Ardoyne                  | 4                | 0                |
|  | Holy Trinity Centre                                   | 0                | 1                |
|  | Victims and Survivors Trust (VAST)                    | 2                | 0                |
|  | Corpus Christi Services                               | 1                | 6                |
|  | Ashton Community Trust                                | 4                | 3                |
| Belfast City Council                       | Relatives for Justice                                 | 5                | 4                |
|  | Lenadoon Community Counselling Network                | 1                | 2                |
|  | Colin Community Counselling Project                   | 3                | 0                |
| Coleraine Borough Council                  | Regimental Association of UDR                         | 1                | 0                |
| Derry City Council                         | Derry Well Woman                                      | 2                | 0                |
|  | C.A.L.M.S   | 2                | 0                |
|  | Columba Celtic Heritage Support Services              | 2                | 0                |
|  | Aurora Counselling Services                           | 2                | 2                |
|  | Pat Finucane Centre                                   | 0                | 0                |
|  | Cunamh  | 5                | 1                |
| Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council | The Peace Factory                                     | 1                | 2                |
| Fermanagh District Council                 | Aisling Centre  | 1                | 2                |
|  | South East Fermanagh Foundation                       | 1                | 2                |
|  | Firinne   | 2                | 0                |
| Omagh District Council                     | Families Moving On                                    | 1                | 1                |
|  | Omagh Support & Self Help Group                       | 1                | 1                |
|  | Tara Centre   | 2                | 2                |
|  | Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma & Transformation   | 2                | 4                |
| Strabane District Council                  | The Koram Centre                                      | 3                | 0                |

|  | <b>Council /Group</b>                    | <b>F/T Posts</b> | <b>P/T posts</b> |
|--|--|------------------|------------------|
| Groups covering more than one Council area | HURT                                     | 2                | 0                |
|  | Contact                                  | 2                | 0                |
|  | HELP NI                                  | 1                | 1                |
|  | NOVA                                     | 0                | 5                |
|  | NI Music Therapy Trust                   | 3                | 0                |
|  | Ely Centre                               | 3                | 0                |
|  | West Tyrone Voice                        | 2                | 0                |
|  | Mourne Action for Survivors of Terrorism | 0                | 2                |
|  | WAVE Trauma Centre                       | 26               | 4                |
| This group covers all Council districts    | Ex Services Mental Welfare Society       | 2                | 0                |
|  | Total                                    | 101              | 56               |

### **Childcare Strategy Development Fund**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 5873/11-15, to detail (i) the criteria Departments need to meet to secure funding through the Childcare Strategy Development Fund; and (ii) how the provision of school film clubs, within the Extended Services Programme, will support the development of the Childcare Strategy.

**(AQW 8903/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** In 2011/12, departments secured funding through the Childcare Strategy Development Fund for bids to support improvements in the provision of childcare services. Future years' bids to the Fund will be considered within the context of the emerging aims and objectives of the Childcare Strategy, which will aim to maximise children's life opportunities and development, and support parents to remain, or become, economically active.

As regards the After School Film Clubs Scheme, funding was awarded in 2011/12 to make provision for expansion of the Scheme, consistent with the aims of the proposed Strategy. The Scheme is a community-based service to boost skills development, to help tackle social exclusion and to support working parents. The funding agreement between DCAL and Northern Ireland Screen recommended that the Film Clubs were facilitated through the Extended Schools Programme to target young people in disadvantaged areas. The Scheme links to the school curriculum by developing storytelling, analytical and social skills in children and young people. The Clubs provide a valuable resource for parents who work full time, particularly in deprived areas, allowing children to remain in school after hours, doing something enjoyable and educational.

### **Childcare Strategy: Timescale**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the timescale for the development of the Childcare Strategy; and (ii) what consideration has been given to the involvement of Non-Governmental Organisations in its development.

**(AQW 8904/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We are committed to developing a Strategy to promote the availability of affordable, accessible and integrated childcare provision. OFMDFM is taking the lead in the development of the Strategy with input from other Departments with key delivery responsibilities.

The current phase of the Strategy's development is considering how departments can work together effectively to develop and implement the Strategy. Officials have also met with members from key Non-Governmental Organisations and will continue to do so as the development of the Strategy progresses.

It is proposed that a consultation process on the draft Strategy will be launched in the summer when all interested parties, including key external stakeholders, will have an opportunity to input their views. These views will then be analysed and used to shape the final Strategy document which we aim to publish before the end of 2012.

### **Victims and Survivors Groups: Paid Employees**

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of paid employees in each group working with victims and survivors, broken down by constituency.

**(AQW 8955/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** A total of 101 full-time and 56 part-time posts are funded across 44 groups through the Strategic Support Fund.

A breakdown by constituency is not available; however, a breakdown by District Council is set out in the table in below.

|  | <b>Council /Group</b>                                 | <b>F/T Posts</b> | <b>P/T posts</b> |
|--|---|------------------|------------------|
| Antrim Borough Council                     | Antrim Youth Information & Counselling centre         | 0                | 2                |
| Armagh City & District Council             | Restorative Action Following on The Troubles          | 1                | 1                |
|  | REACT   | 1                | 1                |
| Banbridge District Council                 | South Down Action for Healing Wounds                  | 1                | 1                |
| Belfast City Council                       | Haven Victim Support Group                            | 1                | 1                |
|  | Springhill Community House                            | 1                | 2                |
|  | Families Beyond Conflict                              | 1                | 0                |
|  | Survivors of Trauma                                   | 3                | 3                |
|  | Niamh (Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health | 1                | 0                |
|  | Wider Circle  | 2                | 0                |
|  | New Life Counselling Service Ardoyne                  | 4                | 0                |
|  | Holy Trinity Centre                                   | 0                | 1                |
|  | Victims and Survivors Trust (VAST)                    | 2                | 0                |
|  | Corpus Christi Services                               | 1                | 6                |
|  | Ashton Community Trust                                | 4                | 3                |
|  | Relatives for Justice                                 | 5                | 4                |
|  | Lenadoon Community Counselling Network                | 1                | 2                |
|  | Colin Community Counselling Project                   | 3                | 0                |
| Coleraine Borough Council                  | Regimental Association of UDR                         | 1                | 0                |
| Derry City Council                         | Derry Well Woman                                      | 2                | 0                |
|  | C.A.L.M.S   | 2                | 0                |
|  | Columba Celtic Heritage Support Services              | 2                | 0                |
|  | Aurora Counselling Services                           | 2                | 2                |
|  | Pat Finucane Centre                                   | 0                | 0                |
|  | Cunamh  | 5                | 1                |
| Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council | The Peace Factory                                     | 1                | 2                |
| Fermanagh District Council                 | Aisling Centre  | 1                | 2                |
|  | South East Fermanagh Foundation                       | 1                | 2                |
|  | Firinne   | 2                | 0                |
| Omagh District Council                     | Families Moving On                                    | 1                | 1                |
|  | Omagh Support & Self Help Group                       | 1                | 1                |
|  | Tara Centre   | 2                | 2                |
|  | Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma & Transformation   | 2                | 4                |

|  | <b>Council /Group</b>                    | <b>F/T Posts</b> | <b>P/T posts</b> |
|--|--|------------------|------------------|
| Strabane District Council                  | The Koram Centre                         | 3                | 0                |
| Groups covering more than one Council area | HURT                                     | 2                | 0                |
|  | Contact                                  | 2                | 0                |
|  | HELP NI                                  | 1                | 1                |
|  | NOVA                                     | 0                | 5                |
|  | NI Music Therapy Trust                   | 3                | 0                |
|  | Ely Centre                               | 3                | 0                |
|  | West Tyrone Voice                        | 2                | 0                |
|  | Mourne Action for Survivors of Terrorism | 0                | 2                |
|  | WAVE Trauma Centre                       | 26               | 4                |
| This group covers all Council districts    | Ex Services Mental Welfare Society       | 2                | 0                |
|  | <b>Total</b>                             | <b>101</b>       | <b>56</b>        |

### **Commission for Victims and Survivors: Consultancy Report**

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether they have commissioned a consultancy report on the Commission for Victims and Survivors; (ii) when the report will be made published, and (iii) for their assessment of the report, including its conclusions and recommendations. [R]

**(AQW 8983/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We are required under Treasury guidance, through the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum, to carry out a review of the Commission every three years. The first review was carried out by KPMG. We have received the report and are currently considering the contents and recommendations.

### **Commission for Victims and Survivors: Budget**

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the annual running costs of (i) the Commission for Victims and Survivors; (ii) the NI Memorial Fund; (iii) the Victims Section of the Community Relations Council; and (iv) the proposed Victims and Survivors Service, broken down by percentage of the overall victims' budget. [R]

**(AQW 8985/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The total allocated Budget for Victims and Survivors for 2011/12 is £12.648m.

| <b>ALBs</b>   | <b>Running costs</b> | <b>Percentage of overall Budget</b> |
|---------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| CVSNI         | £1,006,250.00        | 8%                                  |
| NIMF          | £316,358.00          | 2.5%                                |
| CRC (Victims) | £543,000.00          | 4%                                  |
| VSS           | £100,000.00          | 0.8%                                |
| Total         | £1,965,608.00        | 15.5%                               |

### **Northern Ireland Memorial Fund**

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) for their assessment of the efficacy of the NI Memorial Fund's Individual Needs Based Approach; and (ii) whether the proposed Victims and Survivors Service is expected to adopt the same formula. **(AQW 8986/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The Northern Ireland Memorial Fund continues to deliver a vital lifeline for people who need their help, providing victims with critically important support. Evaluation is an important part of ensuring effectiveness and value for money and ensuring that victims' needs are addressed. To this end, officials have arranged for a full evaluation of the needs based approach to be undertaken in the next few months.

The findings of this evaluation will inform the approach to be taken by the new Victims and Survivors Service with respect to providing assistance to individual victims and survivors.

However, the needs of victims cannot be pigeon-holed into separate categories. The likelihood is that they will experience several interconnected problems at once and the new Service will look at the whole person rather than individual symptoms or issues. It is to be, first and foremost, a holistic Service providing the full spectrum of necessary support and care.

### Arm's-length Bodies: Funding

**Mr Storey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much funding has been allocated to each of their Department's arm's-length bodies in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 8994/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** As at 31 March 2011, OFMDFM sponsored nine Arms Length Bodies (ALBs). The funding allocated during the last three years is outlined in the table below.

The grant-in-aid funding of a departmental Arms Length Body relates to the total running costs of the body, and includes programme expenditure by that body, in addition to its staffing, overhead, and operating costs.

**Table 1: OFMDFM Grant-In-Aid Funding of Arms Length Bodies for financial years 2008/09 to 2010/11**

| OFMDFM Arms Length Bodies   | 2008/09<br>£'000 | 2009/10<br>£'000 | 2010/11<br>£'000   |
|---|------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| The Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland                 | 924              | 993              | 657                |
| Equality Commission for Northern Ireland                            | 7,226            | 6,980            | 6,900              |
| Strategic Investment Board  | 6,978            | 7,074            | 6,360              |
| Ilex Urban Regeneration Company                                     | 1,298            | 1,780            | 2,406              |
| The Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland | 1,853            | 1,838            | 1,599              |
| The Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland       | 783              | 1,264            | 1,126              |
| Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission                   | N/A              | N/A              | 1,284 <sup>1</sup> |
| Community Relations Council for Northern Ireland                    | 7,354            | 8,771            | 9,293              |
| Northern Ireland Memorial Fund                                      | 1,139            | 3,575            | 4,441              |
| Grand Total   | 27,555           | 32,275           | 34,066             |

<sup>1</sup> On the devolution of policing and justice powers in April 2010, sponsorship of NIJAC transferred to OFMDFM. Consequently no funding costs were incurred by OFMDFM with respect to NIJAC for 2008/09 or 2009/10.

### Northern Ireland Memorial Fund: Database

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have to ensure that the database held by the NI Memorial Fund for the last 13 years is transferred to the proposed Victims and Survivors Service.

**(AQW 9029/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The interim management team which is setting up the new Victims and Survivors Service is currently scoping its requirement for management information systems and the related information technology to be put in place. As part of that process, the Service will be looking at systems currently in place, how relevant they may be, the contracts governing those systems and the data protection implications regarding the transfer of information. It is our intention that as much relevant material is transferred as possible.

### Disciplinary Action: OFMDFM Staff

**Mr Kinahan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of staff disciplinary actions taken by their Department in each of the last two years, at Staff Officer level and above, including details of the offence and the disciplinary sanctions applied.

**(AQW 9127/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** No staff disciplinary actions have been taken by our Department in the last two years.

### Jurisdictional Position: Lough Foyle/Carlingford Lough

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what role their Department has had in any discussions between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland on the jurisdiction of Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough.

**(AQW 9135/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** A meeting of UK and Irish Government officials took place in January to discuss a range of specific environmental and marine issues arising from the current jurisdictional position of Carlingford Lough and Lough Foyle. OFMDFM officials attended the meeting as observers in respect of the various statutory responsibilities exercised in both loughs by departments of the Executive and which were relevant to the discussion.

### Jurisdictional Position: Lough Foyle/Carlingford Lough

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is their Department's position on the ownership and jurisdiction of Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough.

**(AQW 9136/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** This is an excepted matter but one in which this administration has a direct interest through its range of statutory responsibilities in relation to both loughs.

### Programme for Government: Consultation Responses

**Mr Weir** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many consultation responses were received on the draft Programme for Government, broken down by constituency.

**(AQW 9287/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We received 432 written responses to the draft Programme for Government (PfG). Of this, 66 respondents did not give any address details. The remaining 366 respondents are broken down by constituency in the table below.

|                         |           |                   |          |
|-------------------------|-----------|-------------------|----------|
| <b>East Belfast</b>     | <b>39</b> | <b>Mid Ulster</b> | <b>7</b> |
| North Belfast           | 84        | Newry&Armagh      | 14       |
| South Belfast           | 71        | North Antrim      | 17       |
| West Belfast            | 16        | North Down        | 17       |
| East Antrim             | 18        | South Antrim      | 3        |
| East Londonderry        | 14        | South Down        | 9        |
| Fermanagh& South Tyrone | 12        | Strangford        | 11       |
| Foyle                   | 5         | Upper Bann        | 10       |
| Lagan Valley            | 12        | West Tyrone       | 7        |

### Minority Ethnic Development Fund

**Ms Lo** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given the indication on 14 February 2012 to the All Party Group on Ethnic Minority Communities that all staff had been assigned to work on the Ethnic Minority Development Fund, and that no staff were progressing the Racial Equality Strategy, whether they will consider hiring temporary staff to progress the Racial Equality Strategy.

**(AQW 9308/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The production of a new Racial Equality Strategy, which will build on the current Strategy, is a key target for this year and work on the revision is currently being taken forward by OFMDFM officials in partnership with the minority ethnic sector. The priority for officials at the moment is to address the issue of the potential gap in funding in the Minority Ethnic Development Fund. However, the Racial Equality Strategy is still being progressed within the Department.

We anticipate making an announcement on consultation during the summer.

### Programme for Government: Consultation Responses

**Mr McCallister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many consultation responses were received on the draft Programme for Government; and whether each of the responses will be reviewed before the final paper is put to the Executive on Thursday 8 March 2012.

**(AQW 9324/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We received 432 written responses to the draft Programme for Government (PfG). Of this number, 149 were transcripts of a verbatim reply on behalf of the environmental group 'Step up for Nature'.

Responses received have been reviewed on an ongoing basis throughout the consultation period to identify emergent issues and develop policy responses. This process has enabled the development of the PfG draft to take account of issues as they have arisen over the 16-week period between the publication of the consultation draft and presentation of the Executive draft. By this means, we have been able to bring a draft PfG to the Executive that reflects fully the issues raised through the consultation process.

### **Social Investment Fund: Strategic Objectives**

**Mr Moutray** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in ensuring that the Social Investment Fund will meet its strategic objectives in relation to supporting communities.

**(AQO 1453/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We have recently sent the consultation report to the OFMDFM Committee and this will shortly be placed on our website. We have also established a project board and are now working through all of the necessary steps to make the fund fully operational early in the next financial year.

We are currently considering the issue of the formation of the steering groups and the support for technical assistance to develop area plans for each of the Social Investment Zones.

These plans will deliver community driven, area based interventions, which will be designed, developed and delivered in partnership with the relevant statutory, voluntary and business sectors to address the interlinked causes and impacts of deprivation.

### **Contracts: Overspends**

**Mr Molloy** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline how they intend to deal with the issue of overspends in their Department's contracts.

**(AQO 1454/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** OFMDFM has robust business case and procurement processes in place to ensure that all spending decisions taken in the Department are accountable.

Managers and, ultimately, the Accounting Officer, is accountable for any overspends that may arise.

Where overspends do occur and approvals are not obtained, the expenditure could be deemed irregular and be reported by the Comptroller and Auditor General in the annual accounts of the Department or Arms Length Body.

As a result of irregular expenditure in 2010/11 OFMDFM Resource Accounts, an Action Plan, monitored by the Department Board, was put in place to address the control weaknesses.

The majority of the recommendations in the Action Plan have been implemented.

### **Budget Review Group**

**Mr Boylan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Budget Review Group.

**(AQO 1456/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** During this Assembly term, the Budget Review Group has met four times. On 31 January it agreed a future work programme to meet on a quarterly basis to report and review progress on key priorities. The priorities identified by the Group were considered to have the greatest potential and most strategic significance during the current Budget period. They typically include alternative options for accessing finance, such as European funding; realising the value of surplus and underutilised assets; and examining the potential for generating efficiencies through, for example, the ongoing review of Arms Length Bodies. Specific pieces of work were commissioned on each of the priority areas and progress on a number of these was discussed by the Budget Review Group when it met on 1 March. A further meeting is being scheduled for May 2012. Recommendations will be made to the Executive on the full range of issues in due course.

### **Minority Ethnic Sector**

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have any plans to introduce a framework for community and voluntary sector involvement in addressing problems that are specific to ethnic minority groups.

**(AQO 1459/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We recognise the need for the involvement of the broader community and voluntary sector in conjunction with the minority ethnic sector in addressing the issues that confront minority ethnic people and accordingly we will address this in the new Racial Equality Strategy.

### **Victims Forum: Membership**

**Mrs Overend** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why applications for membership of the Victims Forum were not advertised publicly.

**(AQO 1460/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The Forum is the statutory responsibility of the Victim's Commission and therefore issues such as membership and process are a matter for the Commission.

### **Victims and Survivors of Institutional Abuse: Advocacy Service**

**Mr Moutray** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when an advocacy service for victims and survivors of institutional abuse will be announced.

**(AQW 9349/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We are committed to establishing an advocacy service that will provide support to victims and survivors before, during and after the inquiry and investigation into historical institutional abuse as soon as the necessary financial approvals are in place.

Until this service is established we have arranged for interim support to be provided to victims and survivors through Lifeline, which can be contacted on 0808 808 8000. Further information on support available to victims and survivors is detailed on the NI Direct website.

### **Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse: Panel**

**Mr Moutray** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they intend to appoint members to the panel for the inquiry into historical institutional child abuse.

**(AQW 9350/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The consideration of potential candidates for the inquiry panel is at an advanced stage and we will make an announcement on this matter to the Assembly in due course.

### **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Article 29**

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what work their Department has carried out, in relation to improving participation in political and public life for people with disabilities, under Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

**(AQO 1525/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities places an obligation on all departments to promote, protect and ensure full and equal enjoyment of human rights by all persons with disabilities.

The involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in all areas of public life is an important aspect of the Convention.

To fulfil this requirement, our Department has engaged with the disability sector to raise awareness of the Convention. It has hosted a number of awareness raising events and supported a programme to raise awareness of the Convention in schools.

The Executive's formal response to our obligations under the UN Convention and the findings of the 2009 Promoting Social Inclusion report on disability will be delivered within the context of a new disability strategy and its associated action plans.

Our Department recruited a sectoral expert to work with our officials to develop the strategy. They engaged with disabled people and their representative organisations as part of this work.

A key priority in the strategy will be to increase disabled people's opportunity to influence policies and programmes in government.

We will launch the draft disability Strategy for public consultation in the next few weeks and we will encourage the involvement of people with disabilities in this exercise. During the development of the action plan to support the Strategy, we will consider how to improve support for disabled people to allow them to access public positions and also to improve attitudes towards people with disabilities.

### **Disability Strategy**

**Mr G Robison** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions they have had to ensure that people with conditions such as Multiple Sclerosis, Myalgic Encephalomyelitis and Epilepsy are given protection under the proposed Disability Strategy.

**(AQO 1528/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The draft Disability Strategy will cover the needs of children, young people and adults; it will also address the needs of the families and carers of people with disabilities. It will be relevant to everyone with a disability, including those with conditions such as Multiple Sclerosis, Myalgic Encephalomyelitis and Epilepsy.

In preparing the draft Strategy, our officials engaged in discussion with disabled people and the main disability organisations to take their views on the issues that the Strategy should address. There will be further engagement when the draft Strategy is published for consultation.



## Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre

**Ms J McCann** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Special EU Programmes Body application for the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze/Long Kesh site.

**(AQO 1532/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We received a letter of offer from Special EU Programmes Body offering project grant aid of up to £18.1m for the proposed Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at Maze Long Kesh.

We are considering the way forward and hope to make a positive announcement shortly.

## Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

### Pony Trekking

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why pony trekking businesses are now required to provide £5 million insurance cover in order to use Forest Service land.

**(AQW 8850/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development):** The arrangements whereby third parties use my Department's land for activities is kept under review to ensure that my Department fulfils its landowner responsibilities and duty of care to all visitors and that third party organisations taking responsibility for activities on the Department's land are required to provide the appropriate level of indemnity.

The Department's legal advice on this matter is that third parties carrying out activities on Forest Service land should have Public Liability insurance from "an insurer approved by and in terms satisfactory to the Department and for an amount not less than £5million in any one occurrence".

Consistent with this advice, the Department now applies the requirement for £5million Public Liability Insurance to such third party organisations including pony trekking businesses.

### EU Pig Welfare Directive

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures she is using to inform pig farmers, particularly those with small holdings, of compliance with the EU Pig Welfare Directive; and what measures she is taking to assist them with compliance.

**(AQW 8861/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The use of sow stalls has been banned here since 2003 and the main provisions of the Directive are contained within the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2000 (as amended). From 1 January 2013 the provisions of the Directive shall apply to all holdings.

My Department is planning a range of communications to remind pig farmers about the requirements of the Pig Welfare Directive. Over the coming weeks, a letter will go to every pig keeper in the north of Ireland alerting them to separate important changes to the rules for the identification and movement of pigs; my Department will also use this opportunity to remind keepers about the requirements of the Pig Welfare Directive. My Department will also place articles in the farming press for this purpose. The Pig Bulletin, which is produced by DARD's CAFRE pig technologists, will continue to highlight the importance of the Pig Welfare Directive to pig farmers.

Over the coming months my Department's Veterinary Service will be inspecting pig holdings, including smaller holdings, to remind farmers of the need to take the necessary steps to comply with the Directive and to help address any issues that they may have. I have asked that my officials bring forward a robust enforcement strategy to ensure that we will have full compliance with the Pig Welfare Directive come 1 January 2013.

Work is currently underway for the next Tranche of the Farm Modernisation Programme (FMP), which aims to provide financial assistance to help farmers modernise their holdings. A number of eligible items will be included specifically for the pig sector and are aimed at helping pig enterprises improve animal welfare, business efficiency and energy efficiency up to a maximum of £4,000 per farm.

### Farm Modernisation Programme

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 8345/11-15, for her assessment of the impact that the criterion, in applications for tranche 3 of the Farm Modernisation Programme, which awards marks to those who have not previously applied for funding, will have on previously unsuccessful applicants.

**(AQW 8939/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** As you will be aware the first two tranches of the Farm Modernisation Programme were extremely popular and heavily oversubscribed. In trying to ensure that those who were unsuccessful or did not apply for funding in the previous tranches have an increased opportunity to avail of funding to modernise, we are proposing to award applications from this group an additional 10 marks.

The inclusion of this new criterion will help to promote equality across all categories by providing additional marks for those who have not applied to the Scheme before or who have previously been unsuccessful. This should act to increase the success rate of groups that were under-represented in previous tranches.

### Moyola River

**Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development which stretches of the Moyola River are (i) designated; and (ii) undesignated.

**(AQW 9103/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Moyola River is designated within the meaning of Drainage (NI) Order 1973, from its confluence with Lough Neagh at Water Foot to its upstream limits at Lisnamuck Bridge near Tobermore.

### Bee Industry: Funding

**Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the European Commission's decision to allocate over £30 million for studies into honey bee colony losses, how much funding she plans to allocate to the bee industry.

**(AQW 9340/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The £30 million funding referred to is in fact for the European Union (EU) Apiculture Programme 2011-13 (€32 million), the north of Ireland and Britain allocation of which is some £1.8 million. The Programme, which operates on a 50% reimbursement of expenditure, seeks to improve the production and marketing of apiculture products. The funding is used here for training, bee inspections and scientific analysis work.

However, a three year pilot surveillance study into honey bee losses is being undertaken at member state level, part funded by the EU. A sum of approximately €3.75 million has been indicated by the European Commission but member states have yet to be advised of allocations. Whilst DARD is not contributing directly to the pilot exercise, outcomes from the study will have relevance to beekeepers here and will be made available in due course.

DARD is currently implementing its 'Strategy for the Sustainability of the Honey Bee' in conjunction with the two beekeeping organisations here and seeks to address all issues affecting beekeeping, including the issue of honey bee losses.

### Bee Population: Sustainability

**Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made on meeting the objectives of her Department's Strategy for the Sustainability of the Honey Bee.

**(AQW 9414/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Strategy for the Sustainability of the Honey Bee, which was published in February 2011, provides a plan of action aimed at sustaining the health of honey bees and beekeeping in the north of Ireland for the next decade.

Beekeepers and officials are currently working in partnership to deliver the aims and outcomes of the Strategy. Delivery is being phased and outcomes and priorities reviewed at regular intervals by the Strategy's Implementation Group. Sector representatives are currently developing action plans for agreement by and implementation through the Strategy's Implementation Group.

## Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

### Libraries: Additional Funding

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she will announce from where the additional funding for libraries will be sourced.

**(AQW 8935/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** I set out below details of how I propose to fund protection of the Libraries service. I have already spoken to the Finance Minister about pressures facing my Department and, in due course, I will be bidding for part of the cost of protecting Libraries. I cannot assume these will be successful, however, and so I must, as a first step, find the full amount of funding internally.

The cost of protecting the Libraries service is £2.89m.

This has been funded by reductions in budgets elsewhere, illustrated in the table below:

| Area                   | 12/13<br>£k | 13/14<br>£k | 14/15<br>£k | Total<br>£k |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 Olympics             | 0.00        | 0.46        | 0.00        | 0.46        |
| 2 Ulster Scots Academy | 0.23        | 0.30        | 0.49        | 1.02        |

| Area               | 12/13<br>£k | 13/14<br>£k | 14/15<br>£k | Total<br>£k |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 3 National Museums | 0.00        | 0.20        | 0.50        | 0.70        |
| 4 Sport NI         | 0.00        | 0.09        | 0.22        | 0.31        |
| 5 Arts Council     | 0.00        | 0.12        | 0.28        | 0.40        |
| Total              | 0.23        | 1.17        | 1.49        | 2.89        |

### EU Fiscal Treaty

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the potential impact on the creative industries if the electorate in the Republic of Ireland votes against the EU fiscal treaty in the forthcoming referendum.

**(AQW 9108/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The creative industries, as highlighted in the draft Programme for Government and Economic Strategy, is a key growth sector for the region. The Executive will continue to support the sector and its potential to rebuild and rebalance the economy irrespective of the outcome of the referendum in which only some Irish citizens can vote.

### Salmon: Net Usage

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many salmon were caught by (i) rod and line anglers; and (ii) commercial fishermen using salmon nets, in the 2011 season.

**(AQW 9142/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Department is currently preparing the data requested at (i) and (ii) above for the 2011 season, but the figures require further verification and as such cannot yet be released.

### Salmon: Conservation and Habitat EU Directive Breaches

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the financial provision that has been made by her Department to pay potential fines for breaches of the EU directives on salmon conservation and habitat.

**(AQW 9144/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am not aware of any infraction proceedings against this DCAL by the European Union and therefore the Department has made no financial provision for infraction fines.

DOE is the lead Department in the north of Ireland for the implementation of the Habitats Directive. DCAL seeks to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Directive and the implementing legislation in the north of Ireland through the discharge of its responsibilities in relation to the conservation and protection of salmon and inland fisheries.

Infraction proceedings by the EU are against Britain as a Member State and not against the devolved administrations or individual Government Departments.

### Eel Management Plan: Lough Erne

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the operation of the Eel Management Plan on Lough Erne, including its impact on the employment of eel fishermen and the level of eel stocks; and whether she will support the restoration of fishing rights to the affected fishermen.

**(AQW 9148/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The North West International River Basin District, Eel Management Plan has made a very tangible contribution to European eel spawner escapement. The conservation fishery delivered 828 kg of healthy sexually maturing silver eels to the coast at Ballyshannon in 2010/11 and 25252 kg in 2011/12.

The eel fishermen have been eligible to tender to participate in the trap and transport conservation fishery and are also free to apply for licences to net other fish species on Lough Erne.

Commercial eel fishing on Lough Erne was permitted by the Department until March 2010. With the approval of the North West International River Basin District, Eel Management Plan and to comply with the European Commission Eel Regulation, the Department had to close the fishery.

Until there is full compliance with Article 2 of the Regulation and this can be demonstrated, there is no prospect of a case to the European Commission for a resumption of an eel fishery outside of the conservation fishery.

### **Eel Management Plan: Trap and Truck**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given that only 2 out of 17 eel fishermen are involved in the trap and truck of silver eels on Lough Erne, what plans has she to provide compensation for those prevented from working by the Eel Management Plan.

**(AQW 9149/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** All Lough Erne eel fishermen were free to tender for the trap and truck conservation fishery.

There is no relevant statutory provision for compensation in the 1966 Fisheries Act which would empower the Department to compensate the eel fishermen.

### **Eel Management Plan: Limited Fishing**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of the upcoming review of the Eel Management Plan, and the apparent health of stocks, will she support limited fishing from June to August.

**(AQW 9150/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The upcoming review of the North West Eel Management Plan covering Lough Erne is a review of the existing plan and does not allow the submission of new or revised plans. The current North West Eel Management Plan outlines the necessity of closure of the fishery regardless of the apparent health of stocks to support and enhance stock recovery.

The European eel stock overall remains critically low and is in danger of extinction. Any exploitation, however limited, will further endanger the species.

### **Disciplinary Action: DCAL Staff**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of staff disciplinary actions taken by her Department in each of the last two years, at Staff Officer level and above, including details of the offence and the disciplinary sanctions applied.

**(AQW 9184/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am unable to respond to this question as the information relates to living individuals who could be identified from the data. This would be a breach of Principle I of the Data Protection Act 1998.

### **TV3 Coverage**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she would raise the issue of TV3 coverage with her counterpart in the Dublin Government.

**(AQW 9188/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am pleased to be able to advise you that, when digital switchover takes place, because of an agreement between the British and Irish governments, RTE 1 and 2 are to be broadcast from transmitters in the North of Ireland while Irish language station TG4, which has been broadcasting from the Divis transmitter since 2005, is to have its broadcast footprint expanded.

The effect of this will be to give these three channels near blanket coverage across the North of Ireland for the first time.

### **UK City of Culture: Funding**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department has provided to the Londonderry UK City of Culture initiative to date; and how much it will provide in total.

**(AQW 9203/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** A DCAL business case has recently been approved for £190k for the City of Culture preparatory/ start up activity for the Cultural Programme. Business cases for 2012/13 and 2013/14 are in development.

In 2011 DCAL also provided £6K support from the Creative Industries Innovation Fund to Derry City Council to support its participation at the Milwaukee Irish Fest and to showcase the North West and £40K funding to the Culture Company to lead on Creativity Month in March 2012.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland has ring-fenced £225k for the City of Culture to pay for major commissions and is contributing a further £100k to a Small Grants Programme being run in association with the Big Lottery Fund.

### **Salmon: Catch and Release Scheme**

**Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an estimate of the timescale by which salmon stocks would be wiped out if anglers were not to comply with the catch and release scheme.

**(AQW 9211/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** It is not possible to be definitive due to the many factors that influence wild Atlantic salmon survival and abundance and the fact that genetic populations are independent and will be at different levels relative to the Conservation Levels for that population.

The Secretary of the North Atlantic Salmon Organisation (NASCO) has stated at the salmon summit in La Rochelle, France in October 2011 that southern salmon stocks could become extinct by 2040 if conservation measures are not introduced now.

### **Salmon Stock: River Bush**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 8548/11-15, why fry or parr were not released into the River Bush as part of the restocking programme in particular years.

**(AQW 9225/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Indiscriminate stocking programmes can denude the river of wild spawners, narrow the gene pool and thus the ability of the population to respond to survival pressures, reduce survival of wild eggs and fry through competition for habitat and food, and may focus a disease problem.

The Department has produced guidance on stocking programmes and this is available at the angling section the Departments website at [www.dcalni.gov.uk](http://www.dcalni.gov.uk) under angling conservation and protection.

The Department also assists wild stocks by placing particular emphasis on in-river habitat rehabilitation works and predator control measures to enhance the wild egg to smolt survival rate. Guidance on habitat is also available on the Departments website.

### **Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs**

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 8520/11-15, how much her Department pays for a box of (i) cream conqueror envelopes; and (ii) cream conqueror paper used to answer Assembly Written Questions.

**(AQW 9318/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** A box of 500 Cream Conqueror envelopes used to answer Assembly Written Questions costs £83.12 and a packet of 500 sheets of Cream Conqueror paper costs £36.90.

### **Away-days and Team-building Exercises: Cost-effectiveness**

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department assesses the cost-effectiveness of awaydays and team-building exercises.

**(AQW 9342/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** To ensure cost effectiveness when organising away-days for business planning and team building purposes, staff are expected to use accommodation and facilities associated with the Department, including its Arms Length Bodies or to avail of suitable premises within the NICS Estate.

### **Líofa 2015/Bród Club**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions she has had with Bernard Dunne or RTÉ representatives about working together to deliver Líofa 2015 and Bród Club.

**(AQW 9347/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I have had no discussions with Bernard Dunne or RTÉ representatives about working together to deliver Líofa and Bród Club.

I have requested that my officials to contact the producers of the show to see if Líofa and Bród Club can work together to deliver mutual benefits.

### **Rugby World Cup 2023**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions she has had with the Irish Rugby Football Association or the Dublin Government about the 2023 Rugby World Cup.

**(AQW 9352/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I would be fully supportive of any bid by the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) to host the 2023 Rugby World Cup in Ireland. To date, however, I have received no approach from either the IRFU or the Dublin Government to discuss the matter.

### **Intercultural Arts Strategy 2012-17**

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Intercultural Arts Strategy, including what steps her Department is taking to ensure that the Strategy incorporates plans for ethnic diversity in the professional arts as well as at community level.

**(AQW 9355/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Arts Council is currently at the final stages in the development of its Intercultural Arts Strategy for the period 2012 – 2017.

The Strategy and Programme will be launched in the lead up to Community Relations Week 2012 and after and will include events both in Stormont and within a community setting.

The Arts Council proposes to meet the creative and social needs of ethnic communities through a set of strategic themes and objectives. These themes include Intercultural Engagement; Developing the Minority Ethnic Arts infrastructure; using the arts to develop Community Cohesion; using the arts to increase awareness of Diversity, and developing programmes that use the arts to develop Good Relations and as a vehicle to tackle Racism.

The Arts Council will also establish an Intercultural Steering Group which will include participation from ethnic artists, arts organisations and umbrella organisations within the minority ethnic sector to provide advice and guidance.

The Intercultural Arts Programme will be launched with dedicated funds made available to community and voluntary groups supporting the themes of the strategy.

### **Woodland: Grant Aid**

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether all the bodies or organisations within her Department's remit which own woodland are compliant with the UK Forestry Standard, including her Department, any arm's-length body and any organisation to which her Department provides grant aid.

**(AQW 9386/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** My Department, and its associated arm's-length bodies, do not own any woodland.

### **Fish Pass: Quoile River**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 9060/11-15, what communication her Department has had with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) in relation to the safe removal of seals from the Quoile River; and whether her Department has any plans to collaborate with the NIEA and to seek the expertise and equipment to safely remove the seals.

**(AQW 9402/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** It is the responsibility of both Rivers Agency as owners of the barrier to repair any damage which might allow seals access to the Quoile River and the NIEA which manages the Quoile Nature Reserve to remove seals from the Quoile River.

DCAL officials have met with representatives of both Agencies and advised them of the Departments concerns about the presence of seals in the Quoile River. The Rivers Agency has been asked to undertake a survey of the barrier and carry out any necessary repairs. The NIEA has been asked for advice and DCAL will be guided by that.

### **Eel Fishing: Lough Neagh**

**Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what advice has been given to the Lough Neagh eel fishermen in relation to hook specification and manufacture; (ii) what amnesty will be given to the fishermen to facilitate the changing of these hooks; and (iii) whether she will extend this amnesty for the entire season for this year only.

**(AQW 9441/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:**

- (i) The Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative has been advised that only hooks which meet the regulatory specifications as defined in the Eel Fishing Regulations (NI) 2010 can be used for long-line eel fishing on Lough Neagh.
- (ii) & (iii) The Regulations governing the size of hooks that can be used for long-line eel fishing have been in force since 1964. The Department cannot sanction the use of hooks which do not meet the statutory requirements.

### **Sports Stadium Development Plans: Social Clauses**

**Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she can give an assurance that strong social clauses will be included in the Regional Stadium Development plans.

**(AQO 1540/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I fully expect that the inclusion of social clauses will be firmly embedded within the plans for the development of the three Regional Stadiums. Going forward relevant clauses will be included in both contracts for professional services and construction works on the stadium Projects.

The Sports Governing Bodies' Project teams working on the stadiums are liaising with my officials, the Strategic Investment Board, Central Procurement Directorate, the Department for Employment and Learning and Sport NI to ensure that the use of social clauses is both applied and optimised through the development of these major construction projects.

### **Re-imagining Communities Programme**

**Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps will be taken to ensure the continued positive impact of the Re-imagining Communities Programme.

**(AQO 1541/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I would like to recognise the success of the Re-imaging Communities Programme in relation to promoting reconciliation and better relationships at community level. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the Arts Council and community representatives in making this programme so successful.

The Arts Council applied to the Peace III Programme to build upon the key successes of the Re-Imaging Programme and to develop the artistic interventions on an intra-community, cross-community and cross-border basis.

They are currently awaiting a letter of offer from the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

### **Twelfth of July: Funding**

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how funding for Twelfth of July events this year compares to previous years.

**(AQO 1542/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** My Department does not directly fund events such as the Twelfth of July celebrations. However, these celebrations have, in the past, received funding through the Arts Council, The Ulster-Scots Agency and the Community Festivals Fund.

As funding programmes for 2012 have not opened yet, it is not possible to compare this year's Twelfth of July events to previous years.

Levels of funding provided will depend on whether applications for funding are actually received and if the applications score highly enough in what are competitive funding streams.

### **Libraries: Opening Hours**

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the reduction of library opening hours.

**(AQO 1543/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** During the public consultation seven thousand people, Assembly Members and political parties all said that libraries are important. I agree with them, for that reason I was pleased to make £2.39 million extra resources available for Libraries NI to help preserve important library services. I have also decided to protect it from making a contribution towards student fees.

This additional money has eased the financial pressure on Libraries NI. Seven of our libraries will not be closing and in general library opening hours will not be reduced as much as originally proposed. However, Libraries NI is still faced with making savings.

The Libraries NI Board decided the number of hours each Branch would open on 19 January. Libraries NI then conducted a local consultation to determine the exact pattern of opening hours for each library, this ended on 4 March.

The public will be advised of the new opening hours for each library by the end of April. Libraries NI plan to implement the revised opening hours from 6 June 2012.

### **Cathedral Quarter Groups: Funding**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she intends to mitigate the reduced funding allocation for Cathedral Quarter groups.

**(AQO 1544/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** My department and the Arts Council work closely with the Department for Social Development and will continue to liaise on support for arts organisations operating in the Cathedral Quarter.

The Arts Council regularly fund many of the arts organisations who have received support from the Laganside Events grant scheme and they will continue to work with client organisations and other funders to ensure the sustainability of our local arts and cultural offering.

I am pleased that it has been announced that funding to the Laganside Events Grant scheme will continue into 12/13 with support from the Department of Finance and Personnel and Department for Social Development.

### **Sport: East Londonderry**

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what funding her Department has provided to sporting initiatives in East Londonderry since April 2011.

**(AQO 1545/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding to sport in the north of Ireland. Since 1 April 2011, Sport NI has provided £49,859 to sporting initiatives in East Londonderry. Furthermore, Sport NI has two pending applications for funding in this area totalling £1,245,000.

Just last month I attended the official opening of a new sports facility at Scroggy Road, Limavady. This included a 3G pitch floodlit pitch, a grass pitch, changing pavilion and car parking - all part funded through Sport NI – and provides a much needed shared space for the local community. I was particularly delighted to see so many local school children playing Gaelic games, soccer and rugby on the day.

## Cultural Tourism

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what her Department is doing to promote Northern Ireland as a destination for cultural tourists.

**(AQO 1546/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure plays a central role in cultural tourism in the north of Ireland and will invest £158.24m capital and £431.19m current funding in the culture, arts and leisure sector over the 4 years of the current CSR Period 2011-2015.

The Department invests in the cultural infrastructure that is essential to attract visitors in the first instance and is central to a positive visitor experience once they get here, for example museums, theatres, sports venues and visitor attractions. In recent years the Department provided significant funding for the arts infrastructure in the north of Ireland with a number of venues benefitting, including the Playhouse Theatre in Derry and the Lyric Theatre and Metropolitan Arts Centre in Belfast.

In addition to this the Department also funded the new Public Records Office building in the Titanic Quarter in Belfast.

The Department also invests significant revenue funding to ensure that there is an attractive arts and cultural programme on offer for visitors. That investment helps to differentiate the north of Ireland from competing locations as a 'destination of choice' for potential cultural tourists.

There are also opportunities to promote cultural tourism in the north of Ireland during the forthcoming decade of centenaries and commemorations.

## Public and Ministerial Appointments: Terrorist Offences

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to people appointed by the Minister or through the public appointments process to her Department or its affiliated bodies, how many have been convicted of terrorist offences.

**(AQO 1547/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Public appointments made by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure are conducted in line with the Commissioner for Public Appointments' NI Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments in NI.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure does not seek, compile or hold information in respect of appointees convicted of political offences as it is not a requirement under the Commissioner for Public Appointments' NI Code of Practice.

## Department of Education

### Preparatory School Funding: EQIA

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education when the analysis of the consultation responses to the Equality Impact Assessment on preparatory schools funding will be published; and to outline the reasons for the delay in publication.

**(AQW 8674/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education):** Over 400 responses were received in respect of the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) consultation on the proposal to withdraw funding from preparatory departments of grammar schools and these have been collated and analysed.

You will recall that the former Minister, Catriona Ruane, took account of the comments received as part of the EQIA consultation exercise and recognised that the complete ending of funding may have caused difficulties for parents and children and possible disruption to some schools. Hence, notwithstanding her publically stated views, she decided to continue funding preparatory departments but at a reduced level. With effect from September 2010 the level of funding was reduced by one-third (i.e. to 20% of an Age Weighted Pupil Unit).

I am planning to complete the final stages of the EQIA and publish it on the Department's website before the end of April 2012.

### Teachers: Redundancy Severance Package

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Education if teachers availing of the 90 week redundancy severance package will be able to return to teaching as substitute teachers.

**(AQW 8738/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** It is not lawful to prevent a teacher who has received redundancy compensation from seeking to return to employment. Nor is it possible to direct a school not to employ such a teacher. However, my Department has repeatedly advised employers that newly and recently qualified teachers should be afforded every opportunity not only to obtain permanent employment but also to gain valuable experience by providing substitute cover and by filling temporary vacancies. Recent changes to the Common Funding Scheme for the Local Management of Schools were intended to encourage schools in this regard.

I should make it clear that the funding I have made available for enhanced redundancy compensation is intended to assist schools in managing a significant increase in the number of teacher redundancies at August 2012 compared with previous years. It is not intended to allow schools to accommodate every teacher who wishes to leave the profession. I should also make it clear



that teachers who lose their jobs in August 2012 as a result of redundancy will receive a compensation payment of three times the number of weeks' pay due under statutory redundancy provisions by reference to age and length of service. Whilst 90 weeks' salary is the maximum payment that a redundant teacher may receive, it is likely that the majority will receive less than this.

### Special Needs Schools: Capital Funding

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education to list all the Special Needs schools that have sought capital funding in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9009/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The information requested is detailed in the table below. It is in respect of stand alone Special Schools and relates to applications for major capital works in the last 5 years.

| School name                                    |
|--|
| Brookfield Special School, Moira               |
| Castletower School, Ballymena                  |
| Elmbrook /Erne Special Schools Enniskillen     |
| Greenwood House Assessment Centre, Belfast     |
| Knockevin Special School, Downpatrick          |
| Mitchell House Special School, Belfast         |
| Rossmar Special School, Limavady               |
| St Gerard's Education Resource Centre, Belfast |
| Tor Bank Special School, Dundonald             |

### Development Proposals

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education (i) to list all the development proposals that have been published in the last three months; and (ii) to detail the length of time between each development proposal being submitted to the Education and Library Boards and being published.

**(AQW 9070/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:**

- (i) There have been 11 Development Proposals published within the last 3 months between 1 December 2011 and 6 March 2012 as tabled below:

| School  | ELB area | Proposed | Date Published | Proposal   |
|---|----------|----------|----------------|--|
| Ballykeigle PS Comber   | SEELB    |          | 13/12/11       | Close 31 Aug 2012  |
| Dunmurry High School  | SEELB    |          | 13/12/11       | Close 31 Aug 2012  |
| Redburn Primary School, Holywood  | SEELB    |          | 20/12/11       | Close 31 Aug 2012  |
| Primate Dixon PS, Coalisland  | SELB     | 18/10/11 | 15/12/11       | Additional nursery unit for 52 full-time places, from 1 September 2012 |
| St Aidan's Christian Brothers Primary School & St Bernadette's Primary School | BELB     | 01/11/11 | 22/12/11       | Amalgamate from 1 September 2012.                                      |
| Edmund Rice Primary School & Star of the Sea Girls' Primary School            | BELB     | 01/11/11 | 22/12/11       | Amalgamate from 1 September 2012                                       |
| Gaelscoil Neachtain   | WELB     | 01/07/11 | 11/01/12       | Establish a new Irish medium PS, from Sep 2012                         |
| Bronte Primary School (501-6612)  | SELB     |          | 16/02/12       | Establish a nursery unit to provide 26 places from 1 September 2012.   |

| School                                   | ELB area   | Proposed | Date Published | Proposal  |
|--|------------|----------|----------------|---|
| Iveagh Primary School (501-1611)         | SELB       |          | 16/02/12       | Establish at nurse unit to provide 26 full time places from 1 Sept 2012 |
| Brackenagh West Primary School           | SELB       |          | 16/02/12       | To extend from 6 Class base school to 7 from 1 Sept 2012                |
| Colaiste Feirste, post primary satellite | BELB/NEELB | 15/11/11 | 28/02/12       | To establish in Maghera, a post primary satellite of Colaiste Feirste.  |

(ii) The table shows the date of the pre-publication consultation for Maintained and Irish-medium schools. Dates for Controlled schools are not included as the ELBs are both the proposer and publisher of these Development Proposals.

The elapsed time between submission of a proposal and its publication is dependent on the complexity of the proposal, the unique circumstances surrounding it and the date it is submitted to the Education and Library Board. For each proposal it is essential that it is clear and unambiguous and provides those wishing to comment with the full facts. As this is a statutory process it is also important that all the required processes have been adhered to prior to publication.

### Disciplinary Action: DE Staff

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of staff disciplinary actions taken by his Department in each of the last two years, at Staff Officer level and above, including detail of the offence and the disciplinary sanctions applied. (AQW 9117/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** In 2010 there were 6 staff disciplinary actions taken by the Department of Education at Staff Officer level and above and in 2011 there were 3. The offences were breaches of the Dignity at Work Policy and the Standards of Conduct Policy. Disciplinary penalties applied were within the range of penalties available to persons exercising formal disciplinary powers as set out in the NICS Disciplinary Policy.

### School Buses

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education how many school buses are owned by the Schools Estate in each Education and Library board area; and how many of these are in use for 52 weeks of the year. (AQW 9227/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am advised by the Education and Library Boards that the number of school buses owned by each Board, (including vehicles retained in reserve for engineering and breakdown purposes), is:

|             |           |
|-------------|-----------|
| <b>BELB</b> | <b>84</b> |
| NEELB       | 131       |
| SEELB       | 169       |
| SELB        | 205       |
| WELB        | 279       |
| Total       | 868       |

All of the Boards' school buses are taken off-road for one week at each of the Christmas and Easter holiday periods for staff holidays, so none are fully utilised for 52 weeks of the year. Of the remaining 50 weeks, buses are available for use (except when undergoing maintenance and servicing) and provide for a 38-week school year, and a range of other services such as school trips, transport of school meals, summer schemes and all-year-round youth activities.

### Londonderry Primary School, Newtownards: Newbuild

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) when his Department took receipt of the Economic Assessment for a new build for Londonderry Primary School, Newtownards, which was commissioned by the South Eastern Education and Library Board; (ii) for his evaluation of the Assessment, and (iii) the current status of the Assessment. (AQW 9243/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:**

(i) The Economic Appraisal for Londonderry Primary School was received by the Department in Autumn 2008.

- (ii) The Appraisal was however returned to the South-Eastern Education and Library Board by Cairtriona Ruane in February 2009 as the need for a capital scheme and options for appraisal had not been agreed.
- (iii) All future capital investment will be considered in the context of the area planning process.

### Primary Schools: South Down

**Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of Education, for each primary school in the South Down area, to detail (i) the enrolment number; (ii) the enrolment capacity; (iii) the current financial situation; and (iv) the percentage of pupils (a) with special educational needs; and (b) who are in receipt of free school meals.

**(AQW 9272/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The information requested is detailed in the table below.

#### Information on primary schools in the South Down Constituency – 2011/12

| School name   | Enrolment number <sup>1</sup> | Enrolment Capacity <sup>2</sup> | % pupils with SEN <sup>3</sup> | % pupils entitled to free school meals |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| All Children's Integrated Primary School            | 215                           | 212                             | 12.6                           | 21.9                                   |
| Annalong Primary School                             | 135                           | 185                             | 17.0                           | 32.6                                   |
| Annsborough Primary School                          | 45                            | 85                              | 20.0                           | 28.9                                   |
| Ballydown Primary School                            | 305                           | 319                             | 19.3                           | 8.2                                    |
| Ballyholland Primary School                         | 219                           | 244                             | 23.7                           | 17.4                                   |
| Brackenagh West Primary School                      | 158                           | 166                             | 24.7                           | 12.7                                   |
| Bronte Primary School                               | 173                           | 174                             | 12.1                           | 10.4                                   |
| Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche                            | 75                            | 87                              | 17.3                           | 34.7                                   |
| Carrick Primary School                              | 410                           | 406                             | 15.9                           | 12.4                                   |
| Castlewellan Primary School                         | 77                            | 100                             | 35.1                           | 19.5                                   |
| Cedar Integrated Primary School                     | 185                           | 196                             | 28.1                           | 10.3                                   |
| Christ the King Primary School                      | 96                            | 197                             | 28.1                           | 30.2                                   |
| Clontifleece Primary School                         | 41                            | 81                              | 19.5                           | 9.8                                    |
| Cumran Primary School                               | 200                           | 203                             | 32.0                           | 18.0                                   |
| Downpatrick Primary School                          | 208                           | 200                             | 37.0                           | 31.7                                   |
| Dromore Road Primary School                         | 93                            | 88                              | 16.1                           | 28.0                                   |
| Drumadonnell Primary School                         | 202                           | 203                             | 16.8                           | 8.9                                    |
| Glasswater Primary School                           | 76                            | 97                              | 18.4                           | 14.5                                   |
| Grange Primary School                               | 96                            | 145                             | 13.5                           | 30.2                                   |
| Holy Cross Primary School, Kilkeel                  | 125                           | 123                             | 13.6                           | 10.4                                   |
| Iveagh Primary School                               | 228                           | 274                             | 21.5                           | 29.8                                   |
| Kilbroney Integrated Primary School                 | 92                            | 140                             | 22.8                           | 34.8                                   |
| Kilkeel Primary School                              | 407                           | 611                             | 22.9                           | 19.4                                   |
| Killowen Primary School                             | 110                           | 116                             | 10.0                           | 9.1                                    |
| Moneydarragh Primary School                         | 67                            | 108                             | 11.9                           | 20.9                                   |
| Newcastle Primary School                            | 117                           | 198                             | 17.9                           | 34.2                                   |
| Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School, Downpatrick | 411                           | 460                             | 20.7                           | 36.5                                   |
| Sacred Heart Primary School                         | 81                            | 136                             | 29.6                           | 28.4                                   |

| <b>School name</b>                           | <b>Enrolment number<sup>1</sup></b> | <b>Enrolment Capacity<sup>2</sup></b> | <b>% pupils with SEN<sup>3</sup></b> | <b>% pupils entitled to free school meals</b> |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Spa Primary School                           | 146                                 | 200                                   | 15.1                                 | 5.5   |
| St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick      | 220                                 | 266                                   | 19.1                                 | 24.5  |
| St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor       | 168                                 | 203                                   | 9.5                                  | 23.2  |
| St Colman's Primary School, Annaclone        | 130                                 | 134                                   | 16.9                                 | 17.7  |
| St Colman's Primary School, Kilkeel          | 185                                 | 454                                   | 29.2                                 | 45.4  |
| St Colman's Primary School, Saval            | 166                                 | 174                                   | 22.3                                 | 19.9  |
| St Colmcille's Primary School, Downpatrick   | 165                                 | 338                                   | 45.5                                 | 63.6  |
| St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint      | 471                                 | 697                                   | 18.3                                 | 29.5  |
| St Francis' Primary School, Castlewellan     | 70                                  | 73                                    | 25.7                                 | 22.9  |
| St Joseph's Primary School, Ardglass         | 64                                  | 76                                    | 25.0                                 | 40.6  |
| St Joseph's Primary School, Ballymartin      | 93                                  | 128                                   | 35.5                                 | 18.3  |
| St Joseph's Primary School, Killough         | 79                                  | 112                                   | 31.6                                 | 40.5  |
| St Joseph's Primary School, Newcastle        | 154                                 | 194                                   | 5.8                                  | 23.4  |
| St Joseph's Primary School, Strangford       | 33                                  | 91                                    | 18.2                                 | 18.2  |
| St Joseph's Primary School, Tyrella          | 65                                  | 115                                   | 26.2                                 | 16.9  |
| St Macartan's Primary School, Loughlinisland | 175                                 | 185                                   | 21.7                                 | 9.7   |
| St Malachy's Primary School, Castlewellan    | 299                                 | 350                                   | 33.1                                 | 32.4  |
| St Malachy's Primary School, Kilclief        | 66                                  | 69                                    | 36.4                                 | 28.8  |
| St Malachy's Primary School, Kilcoo          | 130                                 | 165                                   | 27.7                                 | 26.9  |
| St Mary's Aughlisnafin                       | 156                                 | 166                                   | 19.2                                 | 28.2  |
| St Mary's Primary School, Ardglass           | 89                                  | 81                                    | 25.8                                 | 20.2  |
| St Mary's Primary School, Glassdrumman       | 63                                  | 116                                   | 17.5                                 | 39.7  |
| St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle          | 278                                 | 420                                   | 23.0                                 | 29.1  |
| St Mary's Primary School, Rathfriland        | 102                                 | 115                                   | 18.6                                 | 29.4  |
| St Marys Primary School, Dechomet            | 78                                  | 95                                    | 20.5                                 | 15.4  |
| St Matthew's Primary School ,Magheramayo     | 56                                  | 87                                    | 10.7                                 | 26.8  |
| St Nicholas' Primary School, Ardglass        | 108                                 | 269                                   | 31.5                                 | 44.4  |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Castlewellan    | 44                                  | 95                                    | 6.8                                  | 18.2  |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Downpatrick     | 165                                 | 202                                   | 17.0                                 | 30.9  |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Drumgreenagh    | 76                                  | 84                                    | 13.2                                 | 15.8  |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Hilltown        | 281                                 | 287                                   | 14.6                                 | 28.1  |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge      | 296                                 | 284                                   | 11.1                                 | 17.9  |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Saul            | 176                                 | 174                                   | 17.6                                 | 14.8  |
| St Paul's Primary School, Cabra              | 74                                  | 77                                    | 17.6                                 | 12.2  |
| St Ronan's Primary School, Newry             | 391                                 | 391                                   | 13.3                                 | 11.8  |
| The Holy Family Primary School, Downpatrick  | 190                                 | 195                                   | 25.8                                 | 9.5   |

**Source:** NI school census for enrolment numbers. DE School Access Team for approved enrolment capacity figures.

**Notes:**

- 1 The Enrolment Number has been interpreted to be the actual number of Reception – Year 7 pupils on the school roll as at the October 2011 school census and includes children in receipt of a statement of special educational needs, admitted on appeal or by direction of the Exceptional Circumstances Body. These pupils are supernumerary to a school's approved enrolment capacity.
- 2 Enrolment Capacity has been interpreted to be the approved Reception – Year 7 enrolment number for the 2011/12 school year and does not include any temporary variation to that number which may have been granted by the Department.
- 3 Figures for % SEN pupils relate to pupils at Stage 1 – 5 on the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

**Financial Information - Education and Library Board Primary Schools in the South Down constituency**

| <b>School name</b>                      | <b>Cumulative surplus/deficit at March 2011<sup>(1)(2)</sup><br/>£</b>   | <b>Cumulative surplus/deficit as a % of available Delegated Budget</b> |
|---|--|--|
| All Childrens Integrated PS             | -4,943   | -0.84%   |
| Annalong PS                             | 18,891   | 3.70%  |
| Annsborough PS                          | 5,919  | 2.94%  |
| Ballydown PS                            | 44,934   | 4.88%  |
| Ballyholland PS                         | -43,383  | -7.32%   |
| Brackenagh West PS                      | 6,795  | 1.46%  |
| Bronte PS                               | 10,703   | 2.08%  |
| Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche                | -20,758  | -9.15%   |
| Carrick PS, Warenpoint                  | 51,670   | 4.86%  |
| Castlewellan PS                         | 804  | 0.29%  |
| Christ the King PS                      | 33,867   | 8.93%  |
| Clontifleece PS                         | -3,257   | -1.62%   |
| Cumran PS                               | 161,159  | 19.42%   |
| Downpatrick PS                          | 82,039   | 11.23%   |
| Dromore Road PS                         | 70,104   | 20.95%   |
| Drumadonnell PS                         | 113,969  | 17.02%   |
| Glasswater PS                           | 61,073   | 19.61%   |
| Grange PS                               | 47,591   | 12.27%   |
| Holy Cross PS                           | -16,943  | -5.20%   |
| Iveagh PS                               | 35,274   | 5.06%  |
| Kilbroney Integrated PS                 | 71,109   | 16.33%   |
| Kilkeel PS                              | 100,659  | 8.31%  |
| Killowen PS                             | 4,325  | 1.10%  |
| Moneydarragh PS                         | -11,690  | -4.26%   |
| Newcastle PS                            | 5,465  | 1.12%  |
| Our Lady and St Patrick PS, Downpatrick | no data available – school opened Sept. 2011 after amalgamation of St Patrick's PS, Downpatrick and Convent of Mercy PS. |  |
| Sacred Heart PS, Newcastle              | 20,592   | 6.62%  |

| <b>School name</b>             | <b>Cumulative surplus/deficit<br/>at March 2011<sup>(1)(2)</sup><br/>£</b> | <b>Cumulative surplus/<br/>deficit as a % of available<br/>Delegated Budget</b> |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Spa PS                         | 94,027   | 15.80%  |
| St Brigid's PS, Downpatrick    | 82,504   | 12.12%  |
| St Bronagh's PS, Rostrevor     | -6,399   | -1.14%  |
| St Colman's PS, Annaclone      | 151,054  | 30.07%  |
| St Colman's PS, Killeel        | 21,506   | 3.86%   |
| St Colman's PS, Saval          | 44,062   | 8.85%   |
| St Colmcille's PS, Downpatrick | 59,253   | 7.80%   |
| St Dallan's PS, Warrenpoint    | 90,959   | 5.75%   |
| St Francis' PS, Drumaroad      | -17,228  | -8.09%  |
| St Joseph's PS, Ballycruttle   | 10,397   | 5.24%   |
| St Joseph's PS, Ballymartin    | 13,977   | 3.95%   |
| St Joseph's PS, Carnacaville   | 57,410   | 11.31%  |
| St Joseph's PS, Killough       | 40,091   | 11.85%  |
| St Joseph's PS, Strangford     | 43,515   | 18.16%  |
| St Joseph's PS, Tyrella        | 18,576   | 6.63%   |
| St Macartan's PS               | 124,467  | 20.21%  |
| St Malachy's PS, Castlewellan  | 174,288  | 17.69%  |
| St Malachy's PS, Kilclief      | 21,074   | 8.67%   |
| St Malachy's PS, Kilcoo        | 46,458   | 10.93%  |
| St Mary's PS, Ardglass         | 61,924   | 15.90%  |
| St Mary's PS, Aughlisnafin     | 13,484   | 2.88%   |
| St Marys PS, Dechomet          | 22,770   | 7.40%   |
| St Mary's PS, Glassdrumman     | -37,633  | -17.94%   |
| St Mary's PS, Newcastle        | 58,205   | 5.71%   |
| St Mary's PS, Rathfriland      | 69,773   | 16.56%  |
| St Matthew's PS, Magheramayo   | 56,162   | 20.98%  |
| St Nicholas' PS, Ardglass      | 40,228   | 9.20%   |
| St Patrick's PS, Ballymaghery  | -3,766   | -0.50%  |
| St Patrick's PS, Castlewellan  | -19,421  | -9.97%  |
| St Patrick's PS, Drumgreenagh  | 22,656   | 7.55%   |
| St Patrick's PS, Legamaddy     | 134,498  | 21.88%  |
| St Patrick's PS, Mayobridge    | 13,879   | 1.77%   |
| St Patrick's PS, Saul          | 95,632   | 17.53%  |
| St Paul's PS, Cabra            | 35,049   | 12.30%  |
| St Ronan's PS, Newry           | -8,615   | -0.89%  |
| The Holy Family PS             | 65,770   | 10.59%  |

**Grant-Maintained Integrated Primary School (3) & (4) in the South Down constituency**

| School name         | Comment on Financial Position   |
|---------------------|---|
| Cedar Integrated PS | The reported financial position of Grant-Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools includes an element of non-public funds, which means that it cannot be compared on a like-for-like basis with ELB schools. |
|                     | The Department of Education can confirm that there are no GMI schools with a deficit of public funds at March 2011.   |

**Notes:**

- 2010/11 is the latest Financial year for which financial data are available;
- Data source for the Education and Library Board schools is the 2010/11 Local Management of Schools Outturn Statements from Southern Education and Library Board and from the South Eastern Education and Library Board;
- DE is Funding Authority for the Grant-Maintained Integrated (GMI) sector;
- GMI schools are not reported on in the same way as schools for which ELBs are Funding Authority.

**Source:** School census

**Schools: Asbestos**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with counterparts in Great Britain concerning the dangers of asbestos in school buildings.

**(AQW 9306/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Following the introduction of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003 and the Control of Asbestos (NI Order) 2007 the ELB's arranged for asbestos assessments to be carried out of the schools' estate to ascertain the extent of asbestos containing materials present. Any asbestos containing materials that were identified during assessments as being 'High Risk' were removed following the assessment. Each school has an asbestos register detailing the presence of any asbestos containing materials within that school. This register is available for inspection by any personnel wishing to carry out any works at the school or for information purposes.

In addition Department of Education Circular 2003/20 provides advice on the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003. I have had no discussions with counterparts in Great Britain concerning the dangers of asbestos in school buildings.

**Schools: Financial Viability**

**Ms Lewis** asked the Minister of Education which schools in the South Antrim area are deemed to be in financial viability stress.

**(AQW 9313/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Viability Audits carried out by education and library boards were published on the boards' websites on 6 March 2012. Individual reports for all schools are available, and they include the financial position of each school.

A list of all schools in the South Antrim constituency is set out below. Viability Audit Information on each of them can be found at:

<http://www.neelb.org.uk/schools/area-based-planning/>  
and [http://www.seelb.org.uk/PDFs/SEELB\\_Viability\\_Audit\\_2012.pdf](http://www.seelb.org.uk/PDFs/SEELB_Viability_Audit_2012.pdf)

| Primary Schools   | Post-Primary Schools                        |
|---|---|
| <b>All schools in North Eastern Board area, except for those noted as South Eastern (SEELB)</b> | <b>All schools North Eastern Board area</b> |
| Antrim Primary School   | Antrim Grammar School                       |
| Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School (SEELB)  | Ballyclare High School                      |
| Ballyclare Primary School   | Ballyclare Secondary School                 |
| Ballycraig Primary School   | Crumlin Integrated College                  |
| Ballymacrickett Primary School (SEELB)  | Parkhall Integrated College                 |
| Ballymacward Primary School (SEELB)   | St Benedict's College                       |
| Ballynure Primary School  |   |
| Carlane Primary School  |   |

| <b>Primary Schools</b>  | <b>Post-Primary Schools</b>                 |
|---|---|
| <b>All schools in North Eastern Board area, except for those noted as South Eastern (SEELB)</b> | <b>All schools North Eastern Board area</b> |
| Carnmoney Primary School  |   |
| Creavery Primary School   |   |
| Creggan Primary School  |   |
| Crumlin Primary School  |   |
| Doagh Primary School  |   |
| Duneane Primary School  |   |
| Earlview Primary School   |   |
| Fairview Primary School   |   |
| Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach  |   |
| Greystone Primary School  |   |
| Groggan Primary School  |   |
| Kilbride Primary School   |   |
| Loanends Primary School   |   |
| Maine Integrated Primary School   |   |
| Mallusk Primary School  |   |
| McKinney Primary School Dundrod (SEELB)   |   |
| Moneynick Primary School  |   |
| Mossley Primary School  |   |
| Mount St Michael's Primary School   |   |
| Parkgate Primary School   |   |
| Parkhall Primary School   |   |
| Randalstown Central Primary School  |   |
| Rathenraw Integrated Primary School   |   |
| Round Tower Integrated Primary School   |   |
| St Comgall's Primary School   |   |
| St Joseph's Primary School  |   |
| St Joseph's Primary School  |   |
| St Macnisius' Primary School  |   |
| St Macnissi's Primary School  |   |
| St Oliver Plunkett's Primary School   |   |
| Straid Primary School   |   |
| Straidhavern Primary School   |   |
| Templepatrick Primary School  |   |
| Thompson Primary School   |   |
| Tildarg Primary School  |   |
| Tir-na-Nog Primary School   |   |



**Schools: Asbestos**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Education what plans he has for asbestos training for people working in schools.  
(AQW 9359/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:**

- (i) The education sectors, in line with current legislation and policy, adequately manage the presence of asbestos containing materials in the North of Ireland schools' estate. Currently there are no plans to provide specific asbestos training to school staff.
- (ii) As a result of the introduction of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003 and the Control of Asbestos (NI Order) 2007 the ELBs arranged for asbestos assessments to be carried out of the schools' estate to ascertain the extent of asbestos containing materials present. Any asbestos containing materials that were identified during assessments as being 'High Risk' were removed following the assessment. Each school has an asbestos register detailing the presence of any asbestos containing materials within that school. This register is available for inspection by any personnel wishing to carry out any works at the school or for information purposes. In addition Department of Education Circular 2003/20 provides advice on the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003. I do not currently plan to issue any statement on the matter.
- (iii) Please see below a table detailing the percentage of schools in each ELB area (not including those in the Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated sectors) that currently contain asbestos containing materials.

| Board Area | %      |
|------------|--------|
| BELB       | 67.63% |
| SEELB      | 74.36% |
| SELB       | 90.71% |
| NEELB      | 81.99% |
| WELB       | 88.65% |

**Schools: Asbestos**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Education if he will make a statement on asbestos inspections in schools.  
(AQW 9360/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:**

- (i) The education sectors, in line with current legislation and policy, adequately manage the presence of asbestos containing materials in the North of Ireland schools' estate. Currently there are no plans to provide specific asbestos training to school staff.
- (ii) As a result of the introduction of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003 and the Control of Asbestos (NI Order) 2007 the ELBs arranged for asbestos assessments to be carried out of the schools' estate to ascertain the extent of asbestos containing materials present. Any asbestos containing materials that were identified during assessments as being 'High Risk' were removed following the assessment. Each school has an asbestos register detailing the presence of any asbestos containing materials within that school. This register is available for inspection by any personnel wishing to carry out any works at the school or for information purposes. In addition Department of Education Circular 2003/20 provides advice on the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003. I do not currently plan to issue any statement on the matter.
- (iii) Please see below a table detailing the percentage of schools in each ELB area (not including those in the Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated sectors) that currently contain asbestos containing materials.

| Board Area | %      |
|------------|--------|
| BELB       | 67.63% |
| SEELB      | 74.36% |
| SELB       | 90.71% |
| NEELB      | 81.99% |
| WELB       | 88.65% |

## Schools: Asbestos

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Education what percentage of schools in each Education and Library Board area currently contain asbestos.

**(AQW 9361/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:**

- (i) The education sectors, in line with current legislation and policy, adequately manage the presence of asbestos containing materials in the North of Ireland schools' estate. Currently there are no plans to provide specific asbestos training to school staff.
- (ii) As a result of the introduction of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003 and the Control of Asbestos (NI Order) 2007 the ELBs arranged for asbestos assessments to be carried out of the schools' estate to ascertain the extent of asbestos containing materials present. Any asbestos containing materials that were identified during assessments as being 'High Risk' were removed following the assessment. Each school has an asbestos register detailing the presence of any asbestos containing materials within that school. This register is available for inspection by any personnel wishing to carry out any works at the school or for information purposes. In addition Department of Education Circular 2003/20 provides advice on the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003. I do not currently plan to issue any statement on the matter.
- (iii) Please see below a table detailing the percentage of schools in each ELB area (not including those in the Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated sectors) that currently contain asbestos containing materials.

| Board Area | %      |
|------------|--------|
| BELB       | 67.63% |
| SEELB      | 74.36% |
| SELB       | 90.71% |
| NEELB      | 81.99% |
| WELB       | 88.65% |

## Schools: Ministerial Visits

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of school visit invitations he has (i) received; and (ii) declined since coming into office, broken down by constituency.

**(AQW 9370/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Since coming into office I have received 106 invitations and declined 57. Two invitations are still under consideration.

| Constituency               | Received | Declined | Pending |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|---------|
| Belfast East               | 2        | 1        |         |
| Belfast North              | 7        | 4        |         |
| Belfast South              | 5        | 1        |         |
| Belfast West               | 12       | 5        | 1       |
| East Antrim                | 3        | 3        |         |
| East Derry                 | 4        |          |         |
| Fermanagh and South Tyrone | 9        | 4        |         |
| Foyle                      | 3        | 2        |         |
| Mid Ulster                 | 7        | 3        |         |
| Newry & Armagh             | 13       | 8        |         |
| North Antrim               | 1        | 1        |         |
| North Down                 | 6        | 4        |         |
| South Antrim               | 2        | 2        |         |
| South Down                 | 9        | 7        |         |

| Constituency | Received | Declined | Pending |
|--------------|----------|----------|---------|
| Strangford   | 5        | 4        | 1       |
| Upper Bann   | 11       | 5        |         |
| West Tyrone  | 7        | 3        |         |

### Education and Library Boards: Job Losses

**Ms Lewis** asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of the number of jobs that might be lost as a result of the dissolution of the Education and Library Boards and the introduction of the Education and Skills Authority.

**(AQW 9378/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The original Business Case for the Education and Skills Authority envisaged a reduction of 463 staff. The Business Case is currently being reviewed and no estimate has yet been made regarding the final figure for staff reduction.

### Education and Skills Authority: Engagement

**Ms Lewis** asked the Minister of Education what action the Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team has taken to engage with schools during the transitional period to the single authority.

**(AQW 9379/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** In advance of the planned implementation date for the Education and Skills Authority of January 2010, there was considerable engagement with school Principals through a range of forums including conferences, focus groups, and meetings with informal and formal principal groups. The Chief Executive (Designate) also attended school Governor conferences and met with school Governors to discuss the establishment of the new organisation.

Following the announcement in November 2011 that the new organisation will be established by April 2013, the Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team and the Chief Executive (Designate) have sought to engage further with school Principals and Governors to discuss the implications of the new arrangements for schools. Since November 2011, the Chief Executive (Designate) has already met with school Principals and Governors and attended a Governors' conference and this engagement will increase further over the transition period.

### Education and Library Boards: Voluntary Severance Programme

**Ms Lewis** asked the Minister of Education (i) which Education and Library Boards are currently offering voluntarily severance to staff; (ii) how many staff, to date, have taken voluntary severance; and (iii) how many staff Boards expect to take voluntary severance.

**(AQW 9380/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** A severance scheme is currently open to staff in all education sector organisations. As a result of the 2010-2011 Cost Reduction Programme 209 staff were released. As part of the current 2011-2012 Voluntary Severance Programme, in response to the Savings Delivery Plan, 192 staff to date have been approved for release. It is not necessarily the case that all staff whose applications are approved will ultimately decide to avail of the opportunity and consequently it is also not possible to estimate a figure for staff who are likely to do so.

### Education and Skills Authority: Staff

**Ms Lewis** asked Minister of Education how many staff currently work for the Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team; and how many staff in total it intends to employ.

**(AQW 9381/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team is a branch within my Department. 20 full time and 5 part time staff currently work on the team. It is envisaged that a small number of additional staff may be needed in the run up to the implementation of ESA, but no decision has yet been taken on this.

### Lurgan College

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Education to detail the future of Lurgan College as a grammar school within the two-tier Craigavon-based Dickson Plan for Education.

**(AQW 9415/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Responsibility for the future of controlled post-primary provision in the Lurgan area, including that at Lurgan College, is in the first instance a matter for the Southern Education and Library Board as the school managing authority.

As I set out in my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors to co-ordinate a strategic area planning exercise based on each ELB area to shape the future pattern of education delivery.

I have asked for these area plans to be completed by the end of March 2012 for post-primary schools and June 2012 for primary schools. No school will be looked at in isolation but must be considered in the context of the wider area. Until the work in developing the strategic area plans has been completed and proposals have been brought forward I cannot comment on the future of individual schools.

### Preschool Provision: Rural Areas

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Education, in light of his commitment in the draft Programme for Government to provide one year of funded pre-school education for every child, what steps he intends to take to aid parents wanting to place their children in a funded pre-school in September 2012, particularly in the high demand rural areas.

**(AQW 9424/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Programme for Government commitment to provide one year of funded pre-school education for every child whose family wants to avail of it is consistent with the aim of the Department's Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP), which was launched in 1998.

In the current school year there are over 23,000 children in funded pre-school education provision and if necessary, additional capacity in the sector may be achieved through the creation of new/additional statutory nursery units or by the allocation of additional funded places in voluntary and private pre-school settings participating in the PSEEP.

I have recently approved the creation of 104 new places in four new statutory nursery units at Orchard County PS, Portadown, Waringstown PS, Craigavon,

St Patrick's PS, Mayobridge and Drumadonnell PS, Banbridge. A number of other Development Proposals to increase capacity in the statutory nursery sector are currently under consideration.

In addition the number of DE funded pre-school places in voluntary/private settings has increased by over 1,400 in the past three years.

DE will continue to work closely with the Pre-School Education Advisory Groups in the Education and Library Boards, who are responsible for the planning and provision of pre-school places, to ensure that the Programme for Government target is met.

### Preschool Provision: North Down

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education what proportion of children of the appropriate age in North Down are receiving a year of funded pre-school education.

**(AQW 9435/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** In 2011/12, it is estimated that 91% of children in their immediate pre-school year living in the North Down Local Government District were in funded pre-school education.

#### Note:

- 1 The figure is based on numbers of children resident in North Down who are attending nursery units or reception classes in primary schools, nursery schools and, on the number of funded places in voluntary and private pre-school centres in the North Down area (as the Department does not hold individual level residence information for children at these centres).

### Gavin Boyd

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education how many posts Gavin Boyd currently holds within education administration and how many are paid posts.

**(AQW 9449/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Mr Boyd is employed by my Department as Chief Executive (Designate) for the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). He is also Interim Chief Executive of the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB). He receives no additional remuneration for these responsibilities. The Education and Skills Authority is to be established by 1 April 2013, as part of the Executive's Programme for Government. Under the legislation, the BELB and the other four Education and Library Boards will be dissolved and their functions subsumed within the ESA.

### Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Education when, and under what circumstances, an Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland (UNOCINI) form should be submitted by a teacher; and (ii) under what circumstances relating to child pastoral care and child protection issues should a UNOCINI form not be used.

**(AQW 9451/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The UNOCINI form and related assessment system is intended to be the basis for securing support for children and young people both within and between agencies who work with them.

The UNOCINI form is used for any referral of a pupil to social services by a school where there are concerns of a child protection nature. The form is normally completed by the Designated Teacher for Child Protection or the Deputy Designated Teacher and use of the system is included in the training provided for these positions.

A school can use the form to make referrals to seek support from other services, such as Education Welfare and as the basis for its own record keeping. In these circumstances it is a matter for the school to determine the arrangements which are most appropriate.

### **Teachers: Post-primary Education**

**Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Education to detail the qualification criteria for prospective teachers wishing to be employed in post-primary education.

**(AQW 9452/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The General Teaching Council (GTC) is the self regulatory professional body for teachers and has a statutory duty to determine who should be a member of the teaching profession here.

Persons employed as teachers in grant-aided schools are required to be registered with the Council. As part of its registration process, the GTC approves qualifications for the purpose of registration and eligibility to teach.

Although a teacher registered with the Council is eligible to teach in either primary or secondary schools, when making appointments, employer bodies should ensure that the teacher is suitably trained for the required phase and subject, especially in practical and physical subjects where there is a potential health and safety risk.

Teaching vacancies are widely advertised in the local press and open to all eligible teachers who meet the eligibility criteria. The responsibility for developing relevant and focused job descriptions, personnel specifications and job advertisements rests with the Boards of Governors of individual schools, in consultation with the relevant employing authority. Eligibility criteria must be made known to prospective applicants, related to the ability to do the job, and must be non-discriminatory.

### **Irish-medium School: Dungiven**

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Education whether it is financially viable to open a new Irish-medium school in Dungiven when the existing Irish-medium unit at St Canice Primary School, Dungiven currently functions below capacity.

**(AQW 9459/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** There are two Development Proposals currently with my Department; one for the establishment of Gaelscoil Neachtain as a controlled Irish-medium (IM) primary school in Dungiven and one for the closure of the IM unit at St Canice's Primary School. The latter proposal is predicated upon approval of the former.

The statutory 2-month objection period for the proposal to open the new Gaelscoil ended on 12 March and I will make a decision on it taking account of all the pertinent information and the comments received.

The proposal for the closure of the St Canice's IM unit was published on 7 March and the statutory 2-month objection period is therefore in operation. I will not be in a position to consider the proposal until the consultation period has ended.

I cannot at this stage provide definitive answers to the questions raised; they will, however, be issues that form part of my assessment of the individual merits of these two Development Proposals.

### **Irish-medium School: Dungiven**

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Education whether he intends to finance the existing Irish-medium unit at St Canice Primary School, Dungiven instead of opening a new Irish medium school, Gaelscoil Neachtain, Dungiven.

**(AQW 9461/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** There are two Development Proposals currently with my Department; one for the establishment of Gaelscoil Neachtain as a controlled Irish-medium (IM) primary school in Dungiven and one for the closure of the IM unit at St Canice's Primary School. The latter proposal is predicated upon approval of the former.

The statutory 2-month objection period for the proposal to open the new Gaelscoil ended on 12 March and I will make a decision on it taking account of all the pertinent information and the comments received.

The proposal for the closure of the St Canice's IM unit was published on 7 March and the statutory 2-month objection period is therefore in operation. I will not be in a position to consider the proposal until the consultation period has ended.

I cannot at this stage provide definitive answers to the questions raised; they will, however, be issues that form part of my assessment of the individual merits of these two Development Proposals.

### **Irish-medium School: Dungiven**

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Education whether he has considered the impact to the Irish-medium unit at St Canice Primary School, Dungiven if the proposed new Irish-medium school in Dungiven, Gaelscoil Neachtain, is agreed.

**(AQW 9463/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** There are two 'live' Development Proposals with my Department; one for the establishment of Gaelscoil Neachtain as a controlled Irish-medium (IM) primary school in Dungiven and one for the closure of the IM unit at St Canice's Primary School in Dungiven. The latter proposal is predicated upon prior approval to the former proposal.

The statutory 2-month objection period for the first proposal ended on 11 March. I have however recently agreed to meet with the interim Board of Gaelscoil Neachtain, to hear their views in support of the proposal and it will only be after that meeting that officials will be in a position to provide a submission to me to support my decision on this case.

In the case of the latter proposal for the closure of the St Canice's IM unit; this was only recently published and the statutory 2-month objection period is in operation. I will not be in a position to consider the merits of this proposal until the objection period has ended.

I cannot at this stage provide definitive answers to the questions raised; they will however be issues that form part of the assessment of the individual merits of these two published Development Proposals.

### **Irish-medium/English-medium Schools: Segregated Education**

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Education to outline his position on the segregation of Irish-medium education and English-medium education.

**(AQW 9464/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** There is no segregation of Irish-medium and English-medium education. The 26 Irish medium schools are either within the Catholic Maintained or Controlled sectors, or categorised as Other Maintained. There are also 13 Irish medium Units (9 primary and 4 post primary) attached to English medium schools which are Catholic Maintained schools.

### **Classroom Assistants: Funding**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 8489/11-15, to detail (i) whether individual schools, rather than the Education and Library Boards, are now or will be responsible for the commissioning or funding of classroom assistants; (ii) any changes which have been made or are planned to the employment contracts of classroom assistants; and (iii) whether there is or will be any statutory requirement for schools to hire classroom assistants.

**(AQW 9470/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:**

- (i) My Department has not made any changes to the way Classroom Assistants are or will be commissioned or funded.
- (ii) I am not aware of any changes which have been made or are planned to the employment contracts of classroom assistants however this is a matter for the Education and Library Boards as the employing authority.
- (iii) I can confirm that there is currently no statutory requirement on schools to employ classroom assistants and that the SEN Review has no proposals relating to the employment of classroom assistants or putting a statutory requirement on schools to hire them.

### **Middletown Centre for Autism**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education how many special education schools have availed of the services of Middletown Autism Centre.

**(AQW 9480/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** 37 special schools have availed of the services of the Middletown Centre for Autism to date.

### **Preschool Provision: Newry and Armagh**

**Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to increase pre-school provision in the Newry and Armagh constituency.

**(AQO 1555/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Pre-School Education places are available in statutory nursery schools, nursery units in Primary Schools and in voluntary and private pre-school settings.

The Boards and the Pre-School Education Advisory Groups (PEAGS) within each ELB are responsible for the planning and allocation of pre-school places on behalf of the Department at local level, to ensure that the aim of the Pre-School Education Programme is met. However, it is not always possible to make a place available in the first preference setting expressed by a parent.

For the 2012/13 pre-school admissions process, there are 936 places available in statutory nursery schools and nursery units in Primary Schools in the area. This includes 26 places recently approved at Orchard County Nursery Unit. A provisional allocation of 683 places has been made to providers in voluntary / private settings including a new IME pre-school provider in Armagh town. The decision to bring this provider into the programme (for 2012/13 only at present) was made based on the analysis of first preference applications which evidenced a demand for IM places.

The SELB PEAG will continue to monitor levels of provision across the board area, and will progress additional capacity subject to need and available resources.

The draft PfG included a commitment to provide one year of funded pre-school education for every child whose parent wants it. DE will continue to work with the Education and Library Boards to ensure that the PfG commitment can be met.

### Schools: Closures

**Ms Lewis** asked the Minister of Education how his Department, and its associated bodies, are assisting pupils and parents in schools which are scheduled to close.

**(AQO 1556/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** All proposals for school closures are governed by the statutory Development Proposal process. Always included in this process is an assessment of the availability of alternative and suitable places for pupils whose school may close. It is the statutory responsibility of the Education & Library Boards to ensure adequate provision in their areas.

In the context of closures planned in this manner, the admissions and transport arrangements operated by Education and Library Boards will see children affected by any closure placed in alternative suitable schools within reasonable travelling distance.

### Education and Library Boards: Chief Executives

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education what plans are in place to fill current and future Chief Executive vacancies in the Education and Library Boards.

**(AQO 1557/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Vacancies within the ELBs are advertised in line with the Vacancy Control Policy, pending the establishment of ESA.

There have recently been two vacancies within the ELBs at Chief Executive level, one in BELB and one in SEELB. Both posts were subject to a trawl under Stage 2 of the Vacancy Control Policy, with short-listed candidates interviewed in late February.

In respect of the BELB post, no appointment was made following the recruitment process. In response to a BELB request Gavin Boyd has undertaken the role of Interim Chief Executive, with effect 1 March. The Board is now exploring other options to fill this position, on the basis that this is an interim appointment.

In respect of SEELB, the Board Commissioners have made a recommendation to the Department for the appointment of a Chief Executive on a temporary basis.

### Primary Schools: East Belfast

**Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Education how he intends to progress the plans to rationalise primary schools in East Belfast.

**(AQO 1558/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** You will be aware that I have commissioned the Education & Library Boards, working with CCMS and the other sectors, to undertake an area planning process.

I have asked for initial Area Plans for Primary schools, to be submitted to the Department by the end of June. This will include plans for primary schools in East Belfast. The Boards will then manage a public consultation exercise on the draft Area Plans in due course. This will provide the opportunity for all interested parties to comment before the plan is finalised.

### Education and Skills Authority

**Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Education when he will introduce a Bill on the Education and Skills Authority.

**(AQO 1559/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Bill has been drafted and circulated to Executive colleagues. Subject to Executive agreement, I intend to introduce it in the Assembly in the very near future.

### Drumcree College, Portadown: Closure

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Education whether there is sufficient alternative provision for pupils in the Portadown area if Drumcree College is closed.

**(AQO 1560/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am aware that the Catholic Commission's Post Primary Review recommends that the Drumcree College trustees and CCMS begin discussions on the school's closure.

All proposals for school closures are governed by the statutory Development Proposal process. This ensures that all interested parties have the opportunity to make their views known before any decisions are taken.

Following publication of a Development Proposal there is a two month consultation period during which anyone may make their views known to the Department. I then make a decision on the proposal taking account of all pertinent information and comments received. This always includes an assessment of the availability of alternative places for pupils whose school may close.

## Schools: Rationalisation

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Education how many school rationalisation processes are in progress in all education sectors. (AQO 1561/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** Management of education provision in the schools estate is in the first instance the responsibility of the relevant School Managing Authorities. Should any authority wish to close or amalgamate an individual school they are required to publish a statutory Development Proposal (DP) for the affected school.

Recently I have approved Development Proposals for the closure of two schools and the amalgamation of four schools to form two new schools with effect from 31 August 2012. My Department is also currently considering a further five Development Proposals.

In September 2011, I commissioned the Education and Library Boards in conjunction with CCMS and the other sectoral bodies to develop area plans for the schools' estate. This process is still ongoing and I have asked for the plans for the post-primary sector to be completed by the end of March with plans for the primary sector by end June 2012.

Until the area planning work is completed it is not possible to say what further proposals for rationalisation of the schools' estate may be brought forward by managing authorities.

## Commission for Catholic Education: Post-primary Review

**Mrs McKevitt** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the post-primary review undertaken by the Commission for Catholic Education. (AQO 1562/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** I have asked the Education and library Boards to co-ordinate an area-based planning process. It requires that all education sectors must contribute to a single agreed plan for each board area.

The Catholic Commission's review sets out proposals for the future of the Catholic post-primary sector. It will therefore represent an important element in the collective effort which will deliver those agreed Area plans.

I am however disappointed that the Commission did not provide a firm deadline for the ending of academic selection in its schools.

## Department for Employment and Learning

### Education Maintenance Allowance

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Scottish Government's approach to the administration of the Education Maintenance Allowance. (AQW 8025/11-15)

**Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):** Means-tested Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) were introduced along similar lines throughout the United Kingdom administrations to encourage young people to stay on in full-time education, after reaching the legal age for compulsory attendance and variations have developed among the administrations.

In Scotland, arrangements have been in place since April 2011 to extend the EMA scheme to young people leaving education and not entering training or employment. The eligibility criteria for these additional learners to receive EMA differ from the previous scheme in Scotland as regards required attendance hours, Learning Centre and course accreditations. The administration infrastructure is also different involving Local Authority management and one-to-one advisor – learner contracts or Activity Agreements.

In terms of the future of EMA in Northern Ireland, the options currently being considered are based on findings from the joint review commissioned by my Department and the Department of Education. The intention has been to modify the existing scheme by better targeting it to continue encouraging young people from low household income families to stay on in full time education.

### Further Education Colleges: Health Check Report

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the Further Education College Health Check Report for the North West Regional College for the current year. (AQW 8817/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** The Department compiles and issues health check reports to the governing bodies of all further education colleges on a quarterly basis. The reports detail the performance of colleges across a number of key areas. Reports relating to the first quarter of the 2011/12 academic year were delayed to allow refined performance data to be included. These reports have now been issued to colleges.

### Redundancies: DEL Assistance

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the support his Department can provide when there are multiple redundancies in a concentrated area or in a constituency. (AQW 8825/11-15)



**Dr Farry:** The Department for Employment and Learning works in partnership with the Social Security Agency, training organisations, further education colleges, enterprise agencies and local councils to deliver a joined-up redundancy service to those facing unemployment. Employment Service staff provide on-site redundancy clinics and can organise Job Fairs and Advice Forums in areas where multiple redundancies have occurred and other employers are recruiting.

### Further Education Colleges: Staff

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people are employed full-time at each further education college. (AQW 8826/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** Each further education college, in its capacity as an employing authority, is responsible for all employment related matters. Consequently, my Department does not hold the information requested by the member. I have, therefore, referred this query to the six further education college Directors, each of whom will respond to the member directly.

### Further Education Colleges: Students

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students are currently enrolled at each further education college. (AQW 8827/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** The number of students at each Northern Ireland (NI) Further Education (FE) College in 2010/11 is detailed in Annex A.

#### Annex A

##### Number of Students by NI FE College in 2010-11

| Student Numbers                           | Belfast Metropolitan | Northern Regional | South Eastern Regional | Southern Regional | South West | North West Regional | Total   |
|---|----------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------|------------|---------------------|---------|
| Professional and Technical Students       | 22,397               | 12,570            | 15,707                 | 17,472            | 11,975     | 14,172              | 94,293  |
| Students undertaking recreational courses | 4,660                | 3,796             | 2,044                  | 2,660             | 2,373      | 3,235               | 18,768  |
| Total                                     | 27,057               | 16,366            | 17,751                 | 20,132            | 14,348     | 17,407              | 113,061 |

**Source:** Further Education Statistical Record (FESR)

#### Notes:

- (1) Latest validated data held by my Department pertains to the 2010/11 academic year.
- (2) The figures presented above are a student headcount as opposed to enrolments (where the same student can be enrolled more than once).
- (3) Professional and technical provision relates to those courses which have a qualification aim attached.

### Trade Union: Secondment

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the number of (a) full-time; and (b) part-time staff who are currently on secondment from his Department, or its arm's length bodies, to each recognised trade union; (ii) the salary scale for each secondee; and (iii) the length of each secondment to date.

(AQW 8854/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** The Department for Employment and Learning currently has three full-time Civil Servants, one at Deputy Principal grade, one at Senior Instructional Officer grade and one at Executive Officer 1 grade, who are seconded to NIPSA to carry out full-time trade union duties. There are currently no part-time Civil Servants who are seconded to NIPSA from the Department. There are no staff in the Department's arm's length bodies who are seconded to a trade union.

The 2011/12 salary scales and the length of each secondment to date are detailed below.

| Grade                        | 2011/12 Pay Bands | Length of Secondment to Date |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Deputy Principal             | £34,163 - £38,893 | 6 years 5 months             |
| Senior Instructional Officer | £28,631 - £30,985 | 20 years 2 months            |
| Executive Officer 1          | £23,336 - £26,086 | 5 months                     |

## Apprenticeships

**Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprenticeships have been created in the last five years, broken down by trade.

**(AQW 8864/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The ApprenticeshipsNI programme is an employer-led provision and, as such, it is employers and not my Department that create apprenticeship positions. The data at Annex A details the number of apprentices who started on ApprenticeshipsNI and Jobskills, broken down by sector, for each of the last five years. The Member may wish to note that while the Jobskills Programme was replaced in September 2007 for new starts, existing Jobskills participants continued to progress within Jobskills until their natural conclusion.

### Annex A

#### Apprenticeships NI Starts

| Start Period              | Health, Public Service and Care | Business, Admin and Law | Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care | Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies | Construction, Planning and The Built Environment | Information and Communication Technology | Retail and Commercial Enterprises | Leisure, Travel and Tourism | Arts, Media and Publishing |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---|--|--|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Feb 2007<br>31 Jan 2008 | 194                             | 111                     | 22  | 998  | 999  | 15                                       | 607                               | 17                          | 9                          |
| 1 Feb 2008<br>31 Jan 2009 | 1666                            | 762                     | 27  | 1083                                       | 696  | 81                                       | 2058                              | 15                          | 7                          |
| 1 Feb 2009<br>31 Jan 2010 | 1392                            | 1075                    | 35  | 1206                                       | 691  | 113                                      | 2323                              | 9                           | 18                         |
| 1 Feb 2010<br>31 Jan 2011 | 1933                            | 1640                    | 32  | 1144                                       | 556  | 305                                      | 2904                              | 19                          | 34                         |
| 1 Feb 2011<br>31 Jan 2012 | 1805                            | 2306                    | 75  | 1159                                       | 434  | 248                                      | 3271                              | 34                          | 23                         |

#### Jobskills Starts

| Start Period              | Admin, Clerical, Reception and secretarial | Creative, Educational, Recreational | Health, Community and Personal Services | Selling and Storage | Hotel and Catering Food Preparation | Agriculture and Related | Construction and Civil Engineering | Motor Vehicle Repairs and Maintenance | Printing | Processing | Engineering |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------|------------|-------------|
| 1 Feb 2007<br>31 Jan 2008 | 170  | 1                                   | 502                                     | 131                 | 177                                 | 35                      | 792                                | 146                                   | 11       | 1          | 138         |
| 1 Feb 2008<br>31 Jan 2009 | 25   | 0                                   | 107                                     | 2                   | 3                                   | 10                      | 804                                | 120                                   | 5        | 0          | 92          |
| 1 Feb 2009<br>31 Jan 2010 | 0  | 0                                   | 31                                      | 0                   | 1                                   | 1                       | 36                                 | 7                                     | 0        | 0          | 4           |

| Start Period              | Admin, Clerical, Reception and secretarial | Creative, Educational, Recreational | Health, Community and Personal Services | Selling and Storage | Hotel and Catering Food Preparation | Agriculture and Related | Construction and Civil Engineering | Motor Vehicle Repairs and Maintenance | Printing | Processing | Engineering |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------|------------|-------------|
| 1 Feb 2010<br>31 Jan 2011 | 0  | 0                                   | 0                                       | 0                   | 0                                   | 0                       | 0                                  | 0                                     | 0        | 0          | 0           |
| 1 Feb 2011<br>31 Jan 2012 | 0  | 0                                   | 0                                       | 0                   | 0                                   | 0                       | 0                                  | 0                                     | 0        | 0          | 0           |

### Disabled People: Third Level Education

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people with a disability have completed third level education in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 8878/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The total number of students with a disability who have completed third level education in each of the last five years, for which data are available, broken down by those completing courses and gaining achievements at the Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges (FECs) and by those obtaining qualifications at the Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is set out in the table below.

| Academic Year | FECs - up to and including Level 3 | FECs - HE in FE | HEIs |
|---------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|------|
| 2006/07       | 2,414                              | 78              | 880  |
| 2007/08       | 3,440                              | 161             | 955  |
| 2008/09       | 4,019                              | 180             | 900  |
| 2009/10       | 4,347                              | 202             | 755  |
| 2010/11       | 5,057                              | 194             | 880  |

**Sources:** Further Education Leavers Survey (FELS) & Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

**Notes:**

- (1) In line with HESA's rounding strategy, figures at the HEIs have been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2010/11.
- (3) Information on disability is collected on the basis of a student's self assessment.
- (4) Given the different available definitions of third level education, the data presented above for the FECs have been split into provision up to and including Level 3 and those who have achieved at the HE in FE level.

### Training Schemes

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what schemes his Department funds that are specifically for 16-24 year olds.

**(AQW 8892/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** My Department provides a guarantee of a training place for all eligible unemployed young people aged 16 and 17, with extended eligibility for those with a disability or from an in-care background. Training is offered through the demand led Training for Success and Programme-Led Apprenticeship (PLA) programmes with participants following a chosen occupational area.

The PLA programme was introduced in September 2009 as an intervention measure during the current economic downturn. This intervention offers a similar training opportunity as the employer-led ApprenticeshipsNI, by providing a participant with the opportunity to gain a full apprenticeship framework at Level 2. The work placement is a fundamental element of the PLA programme ensuring that the participant can gain evidence towards a competence based qualification.

ApprenticeshipsNI is my Department's flagship training model for those in employment. ApprenticeshipsNI aims to provide participants with the opportunity to take part in a Level2/Level3 Apprenticeship.

ApprenticeshipsNI is open to those who have reached school leaving age, are either entering or already in employment and contracted to work a minimum of 21 hours per week. The apprentice is in paid employment from day one.

For those aged 16 -24 years my Department undertakes to pay the full costs of the 'off-the-job' training included in the ApprenticeshipsNI framework for the duration of the apprenticeship.

While not specifically for 16 – 24 year olds, the Steps to Work programme is available to anyone aged 18 or over (lone parents aged 16 or over) who is not working or working less than 16 hours per week.

Similarly, while not specifically for 16 -24 year olds, the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) is an all age service initiative designed to help unemployed people in the community overcome those issues that may be preventing them from finding and keeping a job.

In addition to these programmes, the Department also provides financial assistance through the 'Adviser Discretion Fund' to anyone aged 18 or over (lone parents aged 16 or over) who is not working or working less than 16 hours per week, to fund the purchase of goods or services to remove a barrier to employment.

Under the joint DEL/DE means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme, young people aged between 16 and 19 attending schools and Further Education colleges in Northern Ireland are eligible to receive a means-tested weekly allowance (£10, £20 or £30) to encourage them to stay in full-time education, depending on their family household income. In addition, learners are eligible to receive bonus payments of up to £300 a year.

The Department has funded two programmes aimed at raising the aspiration and educational attainment levels of school pupils in disadvantaged areas with traditionally low levels of participation in higher education.

"Step Up" provides an opportunity for young people to improve their academic performance and to gain entry to higher education.

"Discovering Queen's" aims to raise their awareness of higher education. Interventions include taster days, summer schools, master classes and enhanced induction programmes.

Whilst the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NIESF) Programme, 2007-2013 is not specifically targeted at 16 – 24 year olds they are eligible to participate and do take part in projects funded under the programme.

### **Step Ahead: Success Rate**

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the success rate for people who complete the Step Ahead programme.

**(AQW 8893/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** Since Step Ahead was introduced in September 2009, 37% of participants who left the programme by March 2011 found employment (the latest date for which statistics are available).

### **Regional Colleges: Discontinued Courses**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the courses that have been discontinued in each regional college in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 8894/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** My Department does not hold the lists requested by the Member, as information relating to the number of discontinued and new courses is a matter for individual colleges.

My officials have contacted the Directors of the six Regional Colleges who have confirmed that the information is not readily available, and could only be obtained at significant cost.

Therefore, as it is only available at disproportionate cost, I am not in a position to provide the information to the Member.

### **Regional Colleges: New Courses**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the new courses that have started in each regional college in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 8895/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** My Department does not hold the lists requested by the Member, as information relating to the number of discontinued and new courses is a matter for individual colleges.

My officials have contacted the Directors of the six Regional Colleges who have confirmed that the information is not readily available, and could only be obtained at significant cost.

Therefore, as it is only available at disproportionate cost, I am not in a position to provide the information to the Member.

### Working Abroad Expo: Ministerial Meetings

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether she has planned any meetings with the delegation of Government officials and employers from Western Canada, who are attending the Working Abroad Expo in Dublin, and who are seeking to identify sources of skilled labour to help fill vacancies in the construction sector and related trades.

**(AQW 8900/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** I have no plans to meet the delegation of government officials and employers from Western Canada who are attending the Working Abroad Expo in Dublin.

### Regional Colleges: Student Placements and Courses

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many businesses does each regional college have a formal relationship or agreement with in relation to student placements and courses.

**(AQW 8902/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** My Department does not hold the information requested by the Member, as it has no locus in such matters. The six regional colleges have provided the following information, as set out in the table, overleaf:

| Name of College                | Number of businesses with a formal relationship or agreement for the purpose of student placements and courses |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Belfast Metropolitan College   | 1,640  |
| Northern Regional College      | 526  |
| North West Regional College    | 728  |
| South Eastern Regional College | 1,268  |
| Southern Regional College      | 1,500  |
| South West College             | 1,933  |
| Total                          | 7,595  |

### Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College: Proposed Merger

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the reasons why he met with the Equality Commission on the proposed merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast, but did not meet with the Commission regarding St Mary's University College; and whether he has ruled out St Mary's being included in any possible merger.

**(AQW 8934/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** I met with the Equality Commission to discuss its response to the public consultation on the proposed merger of Stranmillis University College with Queen's University. I announced a two-stage study of the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland on 28 November 2011. The second stage of this study will set out options for a more shared and integrated system for the delivery and funding of teacher education.

### ICT Sector

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department has a strategy or policy in place to address the lack of people who are suitably qualified for the information and communication technology sector.

**(AQW 9015/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Sector is recognised by my Department as a priority sector of the Northern Ireland economy. A vibrant and world-class technology skills base is an essential pre-requisite for success in the global economy.

My Department has taken forward a number of areas of work in order to support the ICT sector.

In 2011 my Department and Invest NI convened a focus group of ICT companies and, in conjunction with the South East Regional College, designed and developed a 14 week training programme, incorporating eight weeks classroom based training and a six week work placement, in order to address difficulties in recruiting for software testing positions in the sector. The Software Testers' Academy programme began on 24 October 2011 and finished on 17 February 2012. We are optimistic that all the trainees will secure permanent employment in software testing roles as a result of the Academy. As a result of this success we have agreed with Invest NI that we will instigate a second cohort of the Academy.

Over my period as Minister I have listened to the concerns of employers in the ICT sector on skills issues. In response to these concerns I have established, and Chair, an ICT Working Group made up of key employers in the industry, universities and Further Education colleges, as well as other Government Departments. The purpose of this new working group is to:

- develop a vision and strategy for ensuring the skills needs of the sector are met;
- align supply to demand to ensure a better match in skills;
- enhance career attractiveness to assist continued growth of the sector; and
- ensure that the education sector meets the needs of industry.

This group has now met twice and is developing an action plan to deal with the issues of skills provision, sector attractiveness and improved communications. This action plan will provide a roadmap with specific

actions for all the stakeholders in the sector to ensure that Northern Ireland ICT companies continue to grow and that we remain a location of choice for inward investment.

### Youth Unemployment

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether the Ministerial paper that he is to bring to the Executive will promote an innovative and Northern Ireland specific approach to tackling youth unemployment to address the rise in the number of people claiming benefits.

**(AQW 9026/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The proposals I have put to the Executive are a Northern Ireland specific approach to tackling youth unemployment. I believe the package proposed is innovative.

### Youth Unemployment

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of his comments to the Committee for Employment and Learning on 8 June 2011, when he gave recognition to the Committee's role as a partner to his Department in the development of policy, why he did not seek the views of the Committee on his Executive paper on youth unemployment.

**(AQW 9028/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The proposals I have put to the Executive are cross-cutting and therefore require Executive agreement in the first instance. It is entirely appropriate that the Executive takes a view on this issue before we share our thinking more widely. As soon as the Executive has agreed an approach I will be happy to share the details of that approach with the Committee for Employment and Learning.

### Further Education Colleges: IT Qualifications

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of IT qualifications achieved in Further Education Colleges in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) college; and (ii) level of qualification.

**(AQW 9062/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The number of IT related qualifications achieved in Further Education Colleges for the last 3 years for which data are available is detailed overleaf by (i) college and (ii) level of qualification.

(i)

| College                | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Belfast Metropolitan   | 2,081   | 2,781   | 2,970   |
| Northern Regional      | 494     | 756     | 1,140   |
| South Eastern Regional | 2,111   | 2,737   | 4,138   |
| Southern Regional      | 1,180   | 1,917   | 2,847   |
| South West             | 421     | 740     | 1,165   |
| North West Regional    | 1,003   | 1,288   | 1,480   |
| Total                  | 7,290   | 10,219  | 13,740  |

(ii)

| Level of Study (& Equivalent) | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Entry Level & Level 1         | 3,232   | 4,461   | 7,677   |
| Level 2                       | 2,432   | 3,700   | 4,342   |
| Level 3                       | 1,265   | 1,716   | 1,382   |
| HE in FE                      | 361     | 342     | 339     |

| Level of Study (& Equivalents) | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total                          | 7,290   | 10,219  | 13,740  |

**Source:** Further Education Leavers Survey

**Notes:**

- (i) Data include full and partial qualifications achieved.
- (ii) IT is defined as Sector Subject Grouping 'Information and Communication Technology' plus ICT Essential Skills.
- (iii) 2010/11 is the latest data available.

### Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College: Proposed Merger

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 1394/11-15, (i) whether the staff commissioned for the two-stage study of the teacher education infrastructure are the same members of staff who were tasked with dealing with issues surrounding the proposed merger; and (ii) to provide an estimate of the cost of the study.

**(AQW 9075/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** No members of staff have been commissioned for the two-stage study of the teacher education infrastructure as it is to be carried out by persons independent of my Department. I estimate the cost of the study to be around £50,000.

### JobCentreOnline: Rural Areas

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department intends to provide Job Centre online or internet access points in rural areas to assist people who are unemployed.

**(AQW 9133/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** Responsibility for the provision of JobCentreOnline, the Public Employment Service website in Northern Ireland, lies with the Department for Employment and Learning.

JobCentreOnline can be accessed in any area through a computer with internet access. It can also be accessed via the self service Job Points in the thirty-five Jobs and Benefits offices and JobCentres throughout Northern Ireland. Employment Service staff provide a job search service via the telephone for clients without internet access.

The Department is currently conducting a review of future Information Communication Technology requirements, including JobCentreOnline.

### Training Schemes

**Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning which legislation prohibits the provision of funded training for unemployed people over the age of 58 years; and whether all his Department's schemes for unemployed people pay at least the National Minimum Wage and are not in breach of the Human Rights Act and the Abolition of Slavery Act.

**(AQW 9207/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** There is no legislation prohibiting the provision of funded training by my Department for unemployed people over the age of 58 years. In circumstances where schemes funded by my Department are waged, that is where participants are engaged in subsidized employment, the National Minimum Wage is payable. All other schemes for unemployed people are regarded as training schemes, that is, participants are engaged in training rather than in employment. These arrangements are not in breach of the Human Rights Act or the Abolition of Slavery Act.

### Veterinary Medicine: Funding for Degree Courses

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 8347/11-15, whether his Department will fund a non-repayable grant for annual tuition fees in excess of £3,200 for students who wish to enrol in veterinary medicine degree courses in Britain.

**(AQW 9253/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** For academic year 2012/13 my Department will provide a maximum tuition fee loan of up to £9,000 for eligible students from Northern Ireland who enrol on veterinary degree courses in Britain. There will be no grants available for tuition fees for these courses.

## Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

### Business Start-up Programme/KPMG: Conflicts of Interest

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to KPMG and the Business Start-Up Programme, whether she is aware of the EU concerns regarding conflicts of interest, in respect of large accounting and consultancy companies, and of the proposed legislation to force large consultancy companies to split their audit and consultancy functions. (AQW 7794/11-15)

**Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):** I am aware that the general issue of audit and consultancy is receiving attention from the European Union and that this is at proposal stage. In relation to the specific issue of KPMG and the Business Start Programme, you will appreciate that this is currently subject to a legal challenge. As such, it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this time.

### Hydraulic Fracturing: Tamboran Resources Ltd

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that she has stated that she is unsure of the total financial benefits of the shale gas in Fermanagh, or the potential economic, environmental and health consequences of fracking, why she took the decision to award Tamboran an exploration licence. (AQW 8620/11-15)

**Mrs Foster:** My officials granted a petroleum licence to Tamboran Resources, in accordance with the relevant legislation, after careful consideration of a properly made licence application.

### Geothermal Energy

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when concerns about the lack of legislation on geothermal energy were first raised with her Department; and when she first became aware of these concerns. (AQW 8839/11-15)

**Mrs Foster:** The EU-funded Geothermal Regulations – Heat (GTR-H) Project, in which members of the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland took part and which ran from December 2006 – November 2009, identified the lack of appropriate legislation as a barrier to the development of geothermal energy in a number of EU Member States.

As I said in my Answer to AQW 8356/11-15 of 1st March 2012, my officials are monitoring the progress on geothermal legislation elsewhere in the UK.

### Visa Waiver Scheme

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department has made any estimate of the potential loss to the economy of not having a Visa Waiver Scheme for China, India, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Ukraine, Belarus, Montenegro, Serbia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. (AQW 8848/11-15)

**Mrs Foster:** Visitors from China, India, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Ukraine, Belarus, Montenegro, Serbia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan can enter Northern Ireland on a valid United Kingdom visa.

There are security and resource implications which currently prevent the introduction of a Visa Waiver Scheme in respect of valid Irish visas being used to enter the United Kingdom and I will continue to raise this issue with both Governments.

### Go For It: Business Clinics

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 6708/11-15 (i) given that the Go For It website states that InvestNI will provide a 'business planning 1:1 session to review and finalise your business plan', whether these mentoring hours will be provided; (ii) to outline the nature of the engagement with the Department for Employment and Learning and the Prince's Trust regarding the provision of other services in this area; and (iii) why InvestNI cannot provide figures for the number of business plans that have been produced by start-up businesses. (AQW 8858/11-15)

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI provides individuals with access to either business clinics or 1:1 advisory sessions at which they can receive advice in relation to preparing and completing a business plan. Invest NI does not provide mentoring hours.

Invest NI has an active and on-going relationship with DEL (and its service providers) in relation to the Self Employment strand of its STW programme. Participants on the STW are routinely referred to Invest NI for advice and support in relation to starting their businesses.

Invest NI also has an agreement with Prince's Trust NI (PTNI) that all enquiries received from 18-24 years olds will be referred to the Trusts' Enterprise Programme through which they can receive additional support. Invest NI engages directly with these individuals through the Invest NI business clinics and 1:1 advisory sessions.



In the period October 2011 to February 2012 Invest NI responded to 3216 enquiries, held 88 business clinics and met 444 individuals which in turn resulted in 301 completed business plans.

### **Londonderry Railway Station: Operating Times**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in view of the role of public transport in the tourism industry, and the fact that Londonderry is the UK City of Culture 2013, for her assessment of the operating times of Londonderry Railway Station, particularly after 17.30 each evening.

**(AQW 8877/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The operating time(s) of Londonderry Railway Station is an operational issue for Translink which falls under the remit of the Department for Regional Development.

### **Hydraulic Fracturing: Tamboran Resources Ltd**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail her recent meeting with Tamboran.

**(AQW 8910/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** I met representatives from Tamboran Resources on 15th February 2012. The company provided me with an update on the results of their initial feasibility study and outlined their proposals for the next phase of work including environmental baseline studies to support a possible drilling application and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

### **Foreign Direct Investment: Arizona**

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any current contacts which InvestNI has with Foreign Direct Investment opportunities based in Arizona.

**(AQW 8916/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI's discussions with potential investors are conducted on a commercial in confidence basis. It would therefore be inappropriate to name potential investors as this would jeopardise the possibility of securing the project for Northern Ireland.

Invest NI's presence in North America includes offices in New York, Boston and San Jose, along with representatives in Chicago and Toronto. Arizona is covered by the San Jose office. Despite not having a permanent physical presence in the state, Invest NI actively monitors media, targets and meets companies and attend events in the Arizona area.

In order to maximise its use of resources, Invest NI will target geographical areas that represent the best potential for securing investment in both Northern Ireland's key sectors (primarily Information and communications technology, business services and financial services) and also those emerging sectors where we have a strong offering (creative industries, digital media, the renewables sector).

### **Tourism: Causeway Coast**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the number of visitors to the Causeway coast compares with the number of visitors to the top five tourist destinations in the island of Ireland.

**(AQW 8926/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The latest full year figures are for 2009 and are provided on the basis that the Causeway Coast and Glens destination is made up of 6 Council areas i.e. Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Larne, Limavady and Moyle. In this year an estimated 0.8 million overnight trips, including both out-of-state visitors and domestic trips, were within the Causeway Coast & Glens area.

Regional figures for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are not directly comparable due to the difference in size of the regions, with the Republic of Ireland regions being much larger. Failte Ireland publish visitor estimates for 7 regions within the Republic of Ireland, while the draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 identifies 9 key tourism areas/destinations across Northern Ireland.

Republic of Ireland visitor estimates can be found by accessing the link below.

<http://www.failteireland.ie/Research-Statistics/Tourism-Facts/Annual-Tourism-Facts>

### **Business Start-up Programme: Go Group**

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7789/11-15, what steps her Department took to investigate the alleged breach of confidentiality once it became aware of it.

**(AQW 8936/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The alleged breach of confidentiality by the Go Group is currently being considered in the course of ongoing litigation. It would not therefore be appropriate to comment further at this time.

## Enterprise Development/Go For It Programmes: Funding

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much funding InvestNI allocated to the Enterprise Development Programme and the Go For It programme between December 2008 and December 2011.

**(AQW 8937/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI delivered the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) from April 2009 to September 2011. The EDP had a Go For It element as part of the branding, but Invest NI did not deliver a separate "Go For It Programme".

The original approval for the Enterprise Development Programme forecast a budget of approximately £4.9m per annum for programme delivery costs.

## Invest NI

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much her Department has allocated to InvestNI in each of the last five years; and how InvestNI used this money.

**(AQW 8938/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:**

| £'000        | 2010/11 | 2009/10 | 2008/9  | 2007/8  | 2006/7  |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total Budget | 187,485 | 208,184 | 147,115 | 136,727 | 137,035 |

The total budget includes allocations for programme activities, administration/ running costs, retained receipts, and non-cash budget relating to depreciation and impairment charges. The budget figures also include expenditure on EU funded activities.

The total expenditure is as reported on the annual budget outturn statement to the Department of Finance and Personnel.

A significant percentage of the total budget is directly assigned to programme activities and financial assistance for economic development purposes.

## Health and Safety Executive: Prosecutions

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how many prosecutions have been brought by the Health and Safety Executive in each of the last five years; (ii) how many of these were successful; and (iii) how much each case cost.

**(AQW 8940/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland has, in the past five years, brought 90 prosecutions. Of these, 87 have resulted in a successful conviction, with fines totalling £1.97 million. Taking into account costs awarded, the average cost per case was £1,440.

## Tourism: Key Destinations

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7381/11-15 (i) what consultation has taken place with Larne Borough Council and Moyle District Council regarding the Causeway coast and the Glens of Antrim; (ii) whether the consultations have offered alternatives to the Councils' current tourism strategies; and (iii) whether local MLAs will be consulted on this issue.

**(AQW 8953/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** My Department's draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 (TSNI) advocates for tourism delivery to be focused at 2 levels, national and local, with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) taking the lead at a national level and the local authorities at a local level. Through consultation and facilitation NITB has offered guidance and support at the national delivery level.

To assist the Causeway Coast & Glens destination development, NITB facilitated an Envisioning Day for stakeholders on 2nd November 2011. The aim of this workshop was to achieve a shared vision and collaborative approach to the development of a Causeway Coast & Glens (CC&G) Tourism Area Plan. Invitations were issued to officers from all 6 Councils including Moyle District Council and Larne Borough Council. To inform further consultation NITB organised a Destination Roadshow on 9th February 2012. The outputs of this event are now being used to inform the Causeway Coast & Glens Destination Tourism Area Plan.

The process for the development of a Tourism Area Plan for the Causeway Coast & Glens destination has offered an opportunity for existing local council strategies to feed into and influence the Tourism Area Plan at a wider Destination level.

While NITB has facilitated discussion on wider destination development, the Causeway Coast & Glens Tourism Area Plan has been funded and is therefore the property of the local authorities. NITB is unaware of how the 6 councils plan to consult MLAs on this issue.

### **Ballymena Railway Station: Staff Redundancies**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of Ballymena's position as the gateway to the Glens of Antrim in the event that its railway station is downgraded as a result of staff redundancies.

**(AQW 8976/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Staffing levels are an operational matter for Translink which is required to operate commercially within the current difficult economic environment.

### **Foreign Direct Investment: Competitiveness**

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with members of the business community or InvestNI about ways of improving Northern Ireland's (a) attractiveness to foreign direct investors; and (b) competitiveness compared with (i) the rest of the UK; and (ii) the Republic of Ireland.

**(AQW 8999/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** I meet on a regular basis with members of the business community and Invest NI about ways of improving Northern Ireland's economic competitiveness.

During the recent consultation on the draft Northern Ireland Economic Strategy, I hosted a working dinner with the Chairs from the Institute of Directors; the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry; the Confederation of Business Industry; the Centre for Competitiveness and Invest NI as well as the two University Vice Chancellors. At the meeting, we discussed their views on the draft NI Economic Strategy including ways of improving Northern Ireland's attractiveness to foreign direct investors and competitiveness compared with other regions. I was also able to share some of the key issues emerging from early public consultation engagements on the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy.

### **Tourism: Giant's Causeway**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what analysis she has carried out on the drop in the number of visitors to the Giant's Causeway in 2010; and whether there is any indication that there was or will be a significant increase in the number of visitors in 2011 and 2012.

**(AQW 9001/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** In 2010 the method of calculating the number of visitors to the Giant's Causeway changed. While figures may demonstrate a decline in visitors from 2009 to 2010, it is not possible to determine whether this decline relates to an actual fall in visitors or is a result of methodology change.

Due to this change in methodology visitor figures for the Giant's Causeway cannot be directly compared with figures from previous years, however, figures for 2011 are comparable with 2010 figures.

Figures provided by the National Trust, show that the Giant's Causeway attracted 533,448 visitors in 2011 (for the period January-December) which is an increase of 15% compared with the 2010 visitor figures.

The National Trust business plan, published in December 2008, proposed first year operating figures following the opening of the new Visitor Centre of 700,000 visitors (for the period 2 July 2012-1 July 2013).

### **Electricity Prices**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7003/11-15, how she can direct and oversee energy policy without having the relevant data.

**(AQW 9019/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** As noted in my response to AQW 7003/11-15, my Department does not routinely collect comparative data on domestic electricity prices. However specific data on energy costs is obtained when considered necessary for a particular purpose.

### **Foreign Direct Investment: USA**

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the current potential Foreign Direct Investors within the United States of America, broken down by (i) industrial sector, and (ii) base State.

**(AQW 9036/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI's discussions with potential investors are conducted on a commercial in confidence basis. It would therefore be inappropriate to name potential investors as this would jeopardise the possibility of securing the project for Northern Ireland.

### **Mineral Prospecting Licences**

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what exploratory licences have been granted by her Department and by the Crown Estate for exploration for natural minerals and other assets; (ii) what minerals and assets these exploratory licences cover; and (iii) what percentage of land mass is currently subject to exploratory licences.

**(AQW 9037/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The information requested is as follows.

Mineral Prospecting Licences (MPLs) are awarded for an initial two-year period with the option for a first extension of two years and a final second extension for another two years.

Petroleum Licences (PLs) are granted for an initial period of five years.

**Licences Issued: April 2000 - March 2001**

**Mineral Prospecting Licences**

Name of Company Ballymoney Power Ltd

MPL ref no. MM9 /98

Date Licence issued 1998

Extensions 1st 30.06.00

Commodity Lignite

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds & Gold PLC

MPL ref no. C1 /96

Date Licence issued 1996

Extensions 2nd 13.10.00

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds & Gold PLC

MPL ref no. C2 /96

Date Licence issued 1996

Extensions 2nd 13.10.00

**Petroleum Licences**

Name of Company Evergreen Resources Inc

PL ref no. PL1 /00

Date Licence issued 01.07.96

Name of Company Evergreen Resources Inc

PL ref no. PL2 /00

Date Licence issued 01.07.96

Name of Company Evergreen Resources Inc

PL ref no. PL3 /00

Date Licence issued 01.07.96

Name of Company Evergreen Resources Inc

PL ref no. PL7 /00

Date Licence issued 01.07.96

**Issued: April 2001 - March 2002**

**Mineral Prospecting Licences**

Name of Company Omagh Minerals Ltd

MPL ref no. OM2 /97

Date Licence issued 1997

Extensions 2nd: 18.07.01

Name of Company Ulster Minerals Ltd

MPL ref no. UM1 /02

Date Licence issued 2002

Extensions

Name of Company Ulster Minerals Ltd

MPL ref no. UM2 /02

Date Licence issued 2002

Extensions

**Petroleum Licences**

Name of Company Antrim Resources (NI) Ltd

PL ref no. PL1 /01

Date Licence issued 17.10.01

Issued: April 2002 - March 2003

## Mineral Prospecting Licences

Name of Company Antrim Coal Co. Ltd  
 MPL ref no. AC4 /97  
 Date Licence issued 1997  
 Extensions 2nd: 01.06.02  
 Commodity Lignite

Name of Company Belmore Resources  
 MPL ref no. BR1 /02  
 Date Licence issued 08.11.02  
 Extensions

Name of Company Belmore Resources  
 MPL ref no. BR2 /02  
 Date Licence issued 08.11.02  
 Extensions

Name of Company Ballymoney Power Ltd.  
 MPL ref no. MM9 /98  
 Date Licence issued 1998  
 Extensions 2nd: 30.06.02  
 Commodity Lignite

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds & Gold PLC  
 MPL ref no. C1 /02  
 Date Licence issued 14.10.02  
 Extensions

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds & Gold PLC  
 MPL ref no. C2 /02  
 Date Licence issued 14.10.02  
 Extensions

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds & Gold PLC  
 MPL ref no. C3 /02  
 Date Licence issued 14.10.02  
 Extensions

**Issued: April 2003 – March 2004**

## Mineral Prospecting Licences

Name of Company Tournigan Gold Corporation  
 MPL ref no. TG1 /03  
 Date Licence issued 24.04.03  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Tournigan Gold Corporation  
 MPL ref no. TG2 /03  
 Date Licence issued 24.04.03  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Tournigan Gold Corporation  
 MPL ref no. TG3 /03  
 Date Licence issued 24.04.03  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Tournigan Gold Corporation  
 MPL ref no. TG4 /03  
 Date Licence issued 24.04.03  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Omagh Minerals Limited  
 MPL ref no. OM1 /03  
 Date Licence issued 18.07.03  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Ulster Minerals Limited  
 MPL ref no. UM1 /02  
 Date Licence issued 2002  
 Extensions 1st: 02.01.04

Name of Company Ulster Minerals Limited  
 MPL ref no. UM2 /02  
 Date Licence issued 2002  
 Extensions 1st: 02.01.04

**Issued: April 2004 – March 2005**

## Mineral Prospecting Licences

Name of Company Tournigan Gold Corporation  
 MPL ref no. TG5 /04  
 Date Licence issued 01.09.04.  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds and Gold Plc  
 MPL ref no. C1 /02  
 Date Licence issued 2002  
 Extensions 1st: 14.10.04

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds and Gold Plc  
 MPL ref no. C2 /02  
 Date Licence issued 2002  
 Extensions 1st: 14.10.04

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds and Gold Plc  
 MPL ref no. C3 /02  
 Date Licence issued 2002  
 Extensions 1st: 14.10.04

Name of Company Belmore Resources Limited  
 MPL ref no. BR2 /02  
 Date Licence issued 2002  
 Extensions 1st: 08.11.04

**Petroleum Licences**

Name of Company Finavera Ltd  
 PL ref no. FL1 /04  
 Date Licence issued 01.12.04

Name of Company Connaught Energy  
 PL ref no. CE1 /04  
 Date Licence issued 31.12.04

Name of Company Connaught Energy  
 PL ref no. CE2 /04  
 Date Licence issued 31.12.04

**Issued: April 2005 - March 2006**

## Mineral Prospecting Licences

Name of Company Tournigan Gold Corporation  
 MPL ref no. TG1 /03  
 Date Licence issued 2003.  
 Extensions 1st: 04.04.05

Name of Company Tournigan Gold Corporation  
 MPL ref no. TG2 /03  
 Date Licence issued 2003  
 Extensions 1st: 04.04.05

Name of Company Tournigan Gold Corporation  
 MPL ref no. TG3 /03  
 Date Licence issued 2003  
 Extensions 1st: 04.04.05

Name of Company Tournigan Gold Corporation  
 MPL ref no. TG4 /03  
 Date Licence issued 2003  
 Extensions 1st: 04.04.05

Name of Company Omagh Minerals Limited  
 MPL ref no. OM1 /03  
 Date Licence issued 2003  
 Extensions 1st: 18.07.05

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds and Gold Plc  
 MPL ref no. C1 /02  
 Date Licence issued 2002  
 Extensions 2nd: 14.10.05

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds and Gold Plc  
 MPL ref no. C2 /02  
 Date Licence issued 2002  
 Extensions 2nd: 14.10.05

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds and Gold Plc  
 MPL ref no. C3 /02  
 Date Licence issued 2002  
 Extensions 2nd: 14.10.05

Name of Company Belmore Resources Limited  
 MPL ref no. BR2 /02  
 Date Licence issued 2002  
 Extensions 2nd: 08.11.05

Lapses N/A

Name of Company Ulster Minerals Limited  
 MPL ref no. UM1 /02  
 Date Licence issued 2002  
 Extensions 2nd: 02.01.06

Name of Company Ulster Minerals Limited  
 MPL ref no. UM2 /02  
 Date Licence issued 2002  
 Extensions 2nd: 02.01.06

#### **Issued: April 2006 – March 2007**

##### Mineral Prospecting Licences

Name of Company Irish Salt Mine and Exploration Co. Ltd.  
 MPL ref no. ISME1 /06  
 Date Licence issued 31.08.06  
 Extensions N/A  
 Commodity Salt

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds and Gold Plc  
 MPL ref no. C4 /07  
 Date Licence issued 15.01.07  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds and Gold Plc  
 MPL ref no. C5 /07  
 Date Licence issued 15.01.07  
 Extensions N/A

#### **Issued: April 2007 – March 2008**

##### Mineral Prospecting Licences

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
 MPL ref no. MR4 /07  
 Date Licence issued 01.12.07  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
 MPL ref no. MR5 /07  
 Date Licence issued 01.12.07  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
 MPL ref no. MR6 /07  
 Date Licence issued 01.12.07  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
 MPL ref no. MR9 /07  
 Date Licence issued 01.12.07  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
MPL ref no. MR10 /07  
Date Licence issued 01.12.07  
Extensions N/A

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
MPL ref no. MR11 /07  
Date Licence issued 01.12.07  
Extensions N/A

Name of Company Antrim Resources Plc  
MPL ref no. AR1 /08  
Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
Extensions N/A  
Commodity Salt

Name of Company Dalradian Gold Ltd  
MPL ref no. DG1 /08  
Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
Extensions N/A

Name of Company Dalradian Gold Ltd  
MPL ref no. DG2 /08  
Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
Extensions N/A

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
MPL ref no. Lon1 /08  
Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
Extensions N/A

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
MPL ref no. Lon2 /08  
Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
Extensions N/A

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
MPL ref no. Lon3 /08  
Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
Extensions N/A

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
MPL ref no. Lon4 /08  
Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
Extensions N/A

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
MPL ref no. Lon5 /08  
Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
Extensions N/A

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
MPL ref no. Lon6 /08  
Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
Extensions N/A

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
MPL ref no. Lon7 /08  
Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
Extensions N/A

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
MPL ref no. Lon8 /08  
Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
Extensions N/A

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
MPL ref no. Lon9 /08  
Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
Extensions N/A



Name of Company Portland Gas (NI) Ltd  
 MPL ref no. PG1 /07  
 Date Licence issued 01.01.08  
 Extensions N/A  
 Commodity Salt

#### Lapses

Name of Company Belmore Resources Limited  
 MPL ref no.. BR2 /02  
 Revoked

#### Issued April 2008 – March 2009

##### Mineral Prospecting Licences

Name of Company Omagh Minerals Ltd  
 MPL ref no. OM2 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.05.08  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Omagh Minerals Ltd  
 MPL ref no. OM3 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.05.08  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
 MPL ref no. LON10 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.06.08  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
 MPL ref no. LON11 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.06.08  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
 MPL ref no. MR1 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.06.08  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Bord Gais Network  
 MPL ref no. BG1 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.09.08  
 Extensions N/A  
 Commodity Salt

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
 MPL ref no. MR2 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.11.08  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
 MPL ref no. MR3 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.11.08  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
 MPL ref no. MR8 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.11.08  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
 MPL ref no. MR12 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.11.08  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
 MPL ref no. MR13 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.11.08  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
 MPL ref no. MR14 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.11.08  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Metallum Exploration Ltd  
 MPL ref no. MR15 /08  
 Date Licence issued 01.11.08  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds and Gold Plc.  
 MPL ref no. C1 /09  
 Date Licence issued 01.01.09  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Conroy Diamonds and Gold Plc.  
 MPL ref no. C3 /09  
 Date Licence issued 01.01.09  
 Extensions N/A

#### Lapses

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
 MPL ref no. LON6 /08  
 Relinquished  
 MPL ref no. LON7 /08

Relinquished

#### Issued April 2009 – March 2010

##### Mineral Prospecting Licences

Name of Company Dalradian Gold Ltd  
 MPL ref no. DG3 /09  
 Date Licence issued 25.04.09  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Dalradian Gold Ltd  
 MPL ref no. DG4 /09  
 Date Licence issued 25.04.09  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
 MPL ref no. LON12 /09  
 Date Licence issued 01.07.09  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Gaelectric Developments Ltd  
 MPL ref no. GDL1 /10  
 Date Licence issued 01.02.10  
 Extensions N/A  
 Commodity Salt

#### Issued April 2010 – March 2011

##### Mineral Prospecting Licences

None.

##### Petroleum Licences

Name of Company Infrastrata Plc  
 PL ref no.. PL1 /10  
 Date Licence issued 04.03.11

Name of Company Rathlin Energy Ltd  
 PL ref no.. PL3 /10  
 Date Licence issued 15.02.11

Name of Company P. R. Singleton Ltd  
 PL ref no.. PL5 /10  
 Date Licence issued 22.02.11

**Issued April 2011 – March 2012**

## Mineral Prospecting Licences

Name of Company Dalradian Gold Ltd  
 MPL ref no. DG3 /11  
 Date Licence issued 24.04.11  
 Extensions N/A

Name of Company Dalradian Gold Ltd  
 MPL ref no. DG4 /11  
 Date Licence issued 24.04.11  
 Extensions N/A

## Lapses

Name of Company Dalradian Gold Ltd  
 MPL ref no. DG3 /09  
 MPL ref no. DG4 /09  
 Name of Company Lonmin Plc  
 MPL ref no. LON12 /09

## Petroleum Licences

Name of Company Tamboran Resources Pty Ltd  
 PL ref no. PL2 /10  
 Date Licence issued 01.04.11

My Department holds no information about exploratory licences issued by the Crown Estate.

The Mineral Prospecting Licences were granted in respect of all minerals vested in the Department by the Mineral Development Act 1969 unless otherwise stated. The exceptions relate to licences taken out to prospect for specific minerals. Petroleum licences are issued for "petroleum existing in its natural condition" which "includes any mineral oil or relative hydrocarbon and natural gas existing in its natural condition in strata, but does not include coal or bituminous shales or other stratified deposits from which oil can be extracted by destructive distillation."

48.7% of Northern Ireland's landmass is covered by Mineral Prospecting Licences and 16.2% by Petroleum Licences. A total of 57% of the landmass is subject to exploration licences, taking into account those areas covered by both Mineral Prospecting and Petroleum Licences.

**Debt Advice Service**

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the new contract for the Face To Face Debt Advice Service will be put out to tender.  
**(AQW 9054/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Central Procurement Directorate are finalising the documentation for the integrated debt advice service competition and plan to issue via eSourcingNI by 16 March 2012. The new service should be operational with effect from 1 July 2012.

In the meantime, the existing debt advice contracts delivered by A4e, Advice NI and the Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux have all been extended until 30 June 2012.

**Hydraulic Fracturing: Climate Change**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7750/11-15 (i) for his assessment of the potential impact that the exploitation of 2.2 trillion cubic feet of shale gas reserves, identified by Tamboran resources, might have on Northern Ireland's carbon budget to 2050; and (ii) how much of this 2.2 trillion cubic feet of shale gas reserves should be exploited.  
**(AQW 9065/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** I would refer the Member to the answer given to AQW 8559/11-15.

**Single Electricity Market**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment pursuant to AQW 7003/11-15, if comparative data is not routinely collected, where the information came from to answer AQW 1305/11-15.  
**(AQW 9092/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The response to AQW 1305/11-15 was based on a review of information published by the Department of Energy and Climate Change in GB, information from the Utility Regulator, and an exercise the Department completed in March 2011 to report on energy trends in relation to a specific government PSA target.

**Inward Investment: EU Fiscal Treaty**

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the potential impact on inward investment in Northern Ireland if the electorate in the Republic of Ireland votes against the EU fiscal treaty in the forthcoming referendum.  
**(AQW 9106/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The local economy is not immune to global economic conditions. A number of factors, including ongoing issues in the Eurozone, have led to uncertainty in the markets. As a result, the current pipeline for new Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) projects has been impacted, with companies focussing on cost containment and delaying investment decisions.

Any delay to the recovery in the Eurozone countries could lead to increased uncertainty in the short term and would have a negative impact in terms of investor confidence.

However, there are signs of strength emerging in the US market while India continues to have a strong economy and is forecast for FDI growth. Invest NI is continuing to push the Northern Ireland proposition in its key markets, including the Republic of Ireland, as well as explore FDI opportunities in new emerging markets.

Invest NI also continues to investigate new and emerging sectors which present FDI opportunities for Northern Ireland, such as creative industries, digital media, renewables and professional services.

In addition, the Jobs Fund, a package of temporary measures aimed at boosting employment over the next four years, offers an additional opportunity to promote Northern Ireland in the contact centre and knowledge process outsourcing sectors.

### Utility Companies: Charges

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to review the charges imposed by utility companies on customers who chose not to pay their bills by direct debit.

**(AQW 9140/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Utility Regulator controls the maximum price that the two previous monopoly suppliers (PowerNI and Phoenix Supply Ltd) charge their domestic customers and this covers the various payment types (direct debit, standard credit and pre-payment). Neither my Department nor the Utility Regulator has any statutory role in determining those discounts which energy companies competing with the previous monopoly suppliers may choose to offer customers who pay by direct debit.

All energy supply licences include a requirement that the differential between tariffs resulting in different payment types is cost reflective. Natural gas customers with pre-payment meters are not charged more than the standard credit tariff, and electricity customers using pre-payment meters receive a discount over the standard credit tariff. My Department has therefore no plans to review the current charging arrangements.

### Foreign Direct Investment: Invest NI Global Presence

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the locations worldwide in which InvestNI has a presence; and to outline the nature of that presence.

**(AQW 9147/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest Northern Ireland has a global presence including representation in North and South America, Europe, Asia, the Far East and South Africa.

Invest NI's offices are based in the following locations:

#### \*FDI – Foreign Direct Investment

| Location   | Function    |
|------------|-------------|
| Boston     | FDI         |
| Chicago    | FDI         |
| New York   | FDI         |
| Brussels   | FDI         |
| Dublin     | FDI         |
| London     | FDI         |
| Tokyo      | FDI         |
| Dubai      | Trade       |
| Dusseldorf | Trade       |
| Jeddah     | Trade       |
| Taipei     | Trade       |
| Shanghai   | Trade & FDI |
| Bangalore  | Trade & FDI |

| Location | Function    |
|----------|-------------|
| Mumbai   | Trade & FDI |
| San Jose | Trade & FDI |
| Toronto  | Trade & FDI |

In addition, Invest NI has representation in the following locations:

| Brazil         | Trade |
|----------------|-------|
| Czech Republic | Trade |
| Netherlands    | Trade |
| Russia         | Trade |
| South Africa   | Trade |
| Sweden         | Trade |

Individual office locations and contact details can be found by accessing Invest NI's website at [www.investni.com](http://www.investni.com)

The remit of our overseas offices and advisers includes attracting Foreign Direct Investment, assisting NI companies in researching export markets and developing export sales, developing university linkages and the NI Diaspora network.

## Energy Costs

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the concerns of local businesses regarding high energy costs, specifically the level of pass through charges when compared with similar sized companies in the Republic of Ireland.

**(AQW 9158/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** My Department does not set electricity and gas tariffs, however it works with the Utility Regulator to develop market conditions to put downward pressure on prices. I appreciate the concerns of consumers regarding energy prices, which is an international issue not confined to Northern Ireland.

The retail electricity market is open to competition across Northern Ireland. The retail gas market is currently open to competition in the Greater Belfast area, and the market in the Ten Towns area will be open to competition from October this year (for large industrial and commercial businesses). Business consumers are therefore free to choose their energy suppliers. Following an investigation into business electricity tariffs in 2010, the Utility Regulator produced a buyer's guide to assist business consumers in purchasing energy and switching suppliers. Manufacturing NI also produced guides to help businesses make effective choices in relation to their electricity and gas supplies.

The cost of electricity to end users comprises a number of elements. The largest cost element relates to generation which is highly dependent on the price of natural gas. Regulated elements include costs related to the Single Electricity Market (Capacity Charges, Imperfections Charges and Market Operator charges) which are borne at the same rate in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. There are also regulated costs relating to other elements of overall electricity tariffs including the cost of electricity networks, the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation, and Public Service Obligations costs, some of which are not directly comparable with electricity price elements in the Republic of Ireland.

In respect of natural gas, transmission and distribution networks within Northern Ireland are subject to regulation and these costs, along with the cost of gas are borne by consumers within their gas bills. Gas network costs in Northern Ireland are entirely separate from those in the Republic of Ireland and associated with the recovery of costs required to provide what is relatively new gas infrastructure compared to the longer established gas networks in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

In terms of comparison, it should be noted that Public Service Obligation charges and Transmission Use of System charges per unit of demand, are higher in the Republic of Ireland than in Northern Ireland. It should also be noted that there may be differences in business consumer bills between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland depending on the allocation of costs between different customer groups.

## Disciplinary Action: DETI Staff

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of staff disciplinary actions taken by her Department in each of the last two years, at Staff Officer level and above, including details of the offence and the disciplinary sanctions applied.

**(AQW 9186/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** There has been no disciplinary action taken at Staff Officer level and above over the last two years.

### Trade Publications: Ministerial Contributions

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail all the organisations for which she has provided a (i) Ministerial introduction; (ii) foreword; or (iii) any other introductory or concluding contributions for a publication.

**(AQW 9200/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The table below lists all the publications for which the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment provided articles and forewords from January 2011 to March 2012.

| Article  | Publication                          | Date  |
|----------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Foreword | Licensing & Catering News            | January 2012                                    |
| Foreword | Public Service Review                | February 2011                                   |
| Foreword | Economic Commentary (DETI)           | March 2011/June 2011/November 2011/January 2012 |
| Foreword | Howarth Hotel                        | March 2011                                      |
| Foreword | Centre for Competitiveness           | June 2011                                       |
| Foreword | Ulster Business Top 100              | July 2011                                       |
| Foreword | Federation of Small Businesses Diary | October 2011                                    |
| Foreword | Young Entrepreneur of the Year       | 2011  |
| Foreword | Arts and Business                    | 2012  |
| Foreword | City Business                        | January 2012                                    |
| Foreword | Licensing & Catering News            | January 2012                                    |
| Foreword | Energy Institute                     | January 2012                                    |
| Foreword | Energy Ireland                       | January 2012                                    |
| Article  | Public Service Review                | January 2012                                    |
| Foreword | BDO – family business research       | February 2012                                   |
| Foreword | Business First                       | February 2012                                   |
| Foreword | Business Eye Supplement              | February 2012                                   |
| Foreword | Ulster Community Investment Trust    | February 2012                                   |
| Foreword | Belfast Telegraph Top 100            | March 2012                                      |
| Foreword | Quarry Products Association          | March 2012                                      |
| Preview  | Insider                              | 2012  |

### Business Start-ups

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the number of indigenous business start-ups between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2010, broken down by Parliamentary constituency.

**(AQW 9228/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The table below shows the number of indigenous business start-ups approved by Invest NI between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2010 broken down by Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA).

#### Invest NI Indigenous Business Start-Ups by PCA (2007-08 to 2009-10)

| Pca           | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | Total |
|---------------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Belfast East  | 142     | 116     | 102     | 360   |
| Belfast North | 132     | 108     | 135     | 375   |
| Belfast South | 153     | 132     | 134     | 419   |
| Belfast West  | 146     | 106     | 105     | 357   |

| <b>Pca</b>                 | <b>2007-08</b> | <b>2008-09</b> | <b>2009-10</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| East Antrim                | 163            | 107            | 97             | 367          |
| East Londonderry           | 248            | 168            | 149            | 565          |
| Fermanagh And South Tyrone | 337            | 247            | 220            | 804          |
| Foyle                      | 273            | 168            | 135            | 576          |
| Lagan Valley               | 131            | 90             | 98             | 319          |
| Mid Ulster                 | 283            | 182            | 212            | 677          |
| Newry And Armagh           | 234            | 154            | 145            | 533          |
| North Antrim               | 236            | 137            | 87             | 460          |
| North Down                 | 98             | 86             | 57             | 241          |
| South Antrim               | 131            | 100            | 93             | 324          |
| South Down                 | 218            | 135            | 134            | 487          |
| Strangford                 | 120            | 80             | 72             | 272          |
| Upper Bann                 | 181            | 158            | 120            | 459          |
| West Tyrone                | 252            | 186            | 191            | 629          |
| Unknown                    |                |                | 5              | 5            |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>3,478</b>   | <b>2,460</b>   | <b>2,291</b>   | <b>8,229</b> |

**Notes:**

- 1 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.
- 2 The UNKNOWN category contains offers for which this level of detail is not available.

There were an additional 38 start-ups approved during the period that did not proceed as planned.

**Business Start-ups**

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many of the 8,267 business start-ups between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2010 are still operational.

**(AQW 9229/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Of the 8,267 business start ups approved, 7,825 were under the Enterprise Development Programme. Recent analysis suggests that, of these, 68% of the start-up approvals actually started a business, with 80% of these businesses surviving beyond 12 months. This would suggest that 5,321 businesses started and circa 4,257 of these survived for more than 12 months.

During the same period, Invest NI supported an additional 442 locally-focused business starts through other schemes. Of these our records show that 38 did not proceed as planned and a further 15 are now closed or subject to formal insolvency proceedings. This would indicate that 389 are still operational.

**Business Start-ups: North Down/Strangford**

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to encourage more investment in business start-ups in the North Down and Strangford constituencies.

**(AQW 9230/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI provides a range of financial assistance to support the establishment and growth of new export focussed businesses in the North Down and Strangford Constituencies and across the province. This support is targeted particularly at businesses that sell in markets outside Northern Ireland, are actively pursuing growth plans and can contribute to increased Northern Ireland productivity. Financial support is based on the needs of the project and is normally targeted at areas such as Research and Development, Marketing and Employment.

In addition Invest NI is responding directly to individuals with an interest in starting a locally focussed business. Invest NI provide advice and guidance and engage with other stakeholders providing services in this area including the Department for Employment and Learning and Princes Trust NI.

Social Enterprises can attract grant support towards business start-up costs including salary, marketing, equipment and overheads via the Social Entrepreneurship Programme.

In direct response to the renewed economic downturn, Invest NI launched its Boosting Business initiative in Nov 2011. Businesses can receive advice, guidance and support under a number of themes: Jobs, Exporting, R&D, New technology & Skills.

In addition Invest NI has organised and delivered a series of "Focus on" workshops. Topics covered so far include finance, selling and profit through improvement. These workshops are open to all businesses including those in the North Down and Strangford area.

### **Broadband: Rural Areas**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the provision of rural broadband in Northern Ireland compared with neighbouring jurisdictions.

**(AQW 9299/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Since 2005 broadband services have been available across all rural areas of Northern Ireland. Today a variety of technologies are available to consumers and a range of broadband speeds can be supplied from a range of suppliers. This is as a result of interventions by DETI aimed at stimulating investment to benefit our SMEs. This has included: the award of contracts to supply broadband services to targeted groups; technology pilots to encourage better learning and understanding; and activities to stimulate demand for services from businesses. I believe that this places Northern Ireland ahead of other neighbouring jurisdictions and DETI Telecoms Action Plan for 2011-15, when implemented, will ensure we continue to stay ahead.

### **Broadband: Rural Areas**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with BT regarding the roll-out of high-speed broadband in rural areas.

**(AQW 9301/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** This matter was discussed at my most recent meeting with Colm O'Neill CEO of BT in January of this year at which I highlighted that rural broadband availability continues to be a major issue despite the very significant investments by Government and industry to make it available across all of Northern Ireland using a variety of technologies from a range of suppliers. I emphasised that fixed, wireless, mobile and satellite communications networks will all have a part to play in delivering superfast broadband and that was in both our interests – given commercial and public expenditure constraints – to acknowledge that broadband does not have to be delivered via fixed line technology nor by a single organisation. Mr O'Neill noted this view.

### **4G Mobile Telecommunications**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the timescale for the provision of 4G mobile telecommunications.

**(AQW 9302/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** OFCOM, the UK telecommunications Regulator has responsibility for the spectrum clearance programme and the subsequent auction of spectrum that will allow delivery of 4G mobile services. OFCOM anticipates that 2017 is the earliest reasonable date by which any 4G coverage obligation arising from the auction process might be met. Provision of access to 4G services will however be primarily a matter for commercial decision by the Mobile Network Operators. My Department is in discussions with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Broadband Delivery UK to access funding to position Northern Ireland as a pilot region for the earlier delivery of a 4G solution.

### **Rosemount Primary School, Derry: Solar Panel**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what funding is available to allow Rosemount Primary School, Derry to install a solar panel in a cottage being built to mark its Centenary.

**(AQW 9338/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The method of funding will be dependent on the type of solar panel being installed. Solar photovoltaic (PV) panels are used to generate renewable electricity for attached premises whilst solar thermal panels generate renewable heating for hot water purposes.

Solar PV panels are incentivised by the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation which provides a revenue stream for the renewable electricity generated in the form of Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROCs) which can be sold to electricity suppliers. Further information can be found at [www.energy.detini.gov.uk](http://www.energy.detini.gov.uk). DETI does not offer grants towards the installation of solar PV panels for renewable electricity.

It has been proposed to incentivise the uptake of solar thermal panels, and other renewable heating technologies, under a future Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI). My Department consulted on these proposals between July – October 2011, further information can be found at the aforementioned website. The Northern Ireland RHI would provide payments for renewable heating installations for the renewable heat generated; the amount of payment depends on the type and size of installation. Under the most recent proposals a solar thermal panel (up to 200kWth) would receive 8.5p/kWh for the lifetime of the technology (to a maximum of 20 years). Following the consultation further analysis was required and I plan to make an announcement shortly on the final design of the Northern Ireland RHI.



## Broadband: Direct Fibre Optic Connection

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many properties have a direct fibre optic connection. (AQW 9412/11-15)

**Mrs Foster:** My Department does not hold this information.

## Department of the Environment

### Planning (Northern Ireland) Act 2011: Guidelines

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of the Environment when his Department will publish the new guidelines that will come into effect following the introduction of the Planning Act. (AQO 296/11-15)

**Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):** Most of the provisions within the Planning (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 will only apply once planning powers transfer to district councils as part of local government reform. Many of these provisions will require subordinate legislation to bring them into operation. Drafting of key subordinate legislation has begun and the subordinate legislation and guidance will be in place before powers transfer.

In advance of the transfer of powers to councils I am bringing forward a Bill that will accelerate the implementation of a number of those reforms, to be administered by the Department. I intend to introduce the Bill in this Assembly session and to have the reforms in place sooner rather than later.

### Townlands: Postal Addresses

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the rationale behind the statement from his Department to Fermanagh District Council, contained within COR/13/08 and COR/47/09, that the legislative change previously proposed by the Council would provide neither a feasible nor practical way forward as a method of enabling councils to number houses in a particular townland by referring to the townland only. (AQW 3031/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** Road naming and numbering is governed by the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, ("the 1995 Order") and this legislation is the responsibility of the Department of the Environment. The purpose of an address is to provide a unique reference for a property/postal delivery point and assistance in reaching that property/postal delivery point. Streets have a linear logic to them, whereas townlands do not. Difficulties would arise in numbering houses in townlands, particularly when additional houses were built and needed new numbers.

Although there is no legal requirement to include townlands within postal addresses it is a practice that is supported, where possible, in government communications. Some councils have encouraged promotion of townlands by including them on street nameplates under the street name. The 1995 Order does not prevent the use of townland names within any postal address.

There are difficulties in dealing with UK based or UK administered banks, insurance companies etc. whose systems only accept standard UK addresses using street/road names and postcodes and this could/has had a detrimental effect on some residents. Visitors and tourists who may need emergency assistance could have difficulty in establishing their location if only townlands are used.

This was the rationale that was used at the time of these correspondence cases. I have subsequently written to the Council on this issue, being as supportive as I can on an issue which I believe is important.

### MOT Tests: Revenue

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of the Environment how much revenue his Department raised through MOT tests in the (i) 2009/10; and (ii) 2010/11 financial years. (AQW 3769/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** The total revenue generated in each year for all vehicle tests were as follows:

|         |             |
|---------|-------------|
| 2009/10 | £26,614,000 |
| 2010/11 | £28,000,000 |

The figures are for full tests and retests carried out on all vehicles by the Driver & Vehicle Agency and are given to the nearest £ 000's.

### **Planning: George Best Belfast City Airport**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment why a new inquiry into the George Best Belfast City Airport's Planning Agreement is necessary when a full examination in public reported on the Planning Agreement in 2006.

**(AQW 4573/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The reason I am seeking to modify the Planning Agreement is to bring the most important planning issues at the George Best Belfast City Airport to a conclusion in a cohesive and inclusive way. The issue of the noise contour has not been concluded. It is not good enough for local people or for others that uncertainty continues. I plan to be decisive and remove doubt. That is what people should properly expect from me as Minister. Doubt or drift is not an option.

My objective is to secure the establishment of a fair and effective noise management system at the airport, based on noise control contour(s), that achieves the right balance between the social and economic benefits of airport with the need to protect the quality of life for local residents and the environment.

### **Local Government Reform Programme**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Reform of Local Government.

**(AQO 862/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** As the Minister responsible for implementation of the local government reform programme, I shall manage reform in line with the 2015 timetable proposed in the draft Programme for Government 2011-15.

I am taking forward the programme of legislation required to give effect to local government reorganisation. There are two main pieces of legislation, the first of which is the draft Local Government (Boundaries) Order (NI) 2012, which has recently been agreed by the Executive and will be laid before the Assembly in the near future. The second is the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill which, subject to the Executive's agreement, I intend to introduce during the autumn session to give effect to the Executive's decisions on the future shape of local government.

I am also establishing the implementation structures needed to help manage and integrate the work needed to bring about the operational delivery of the overall reform programme. I will shortly be forming a Regional Transition Committee, which I will chair, to provide the high level political leadership necessary to drive implementation forward. Its membership will include the Chairs of the 11 Voluntary Transition Committees. Indeed, I have already written to Council Mayors and Chairs requesting that they restore the eleven Transition Committees by the end of this month. This will enable convergence work to commence in each of the council groupings.

### **Planning Permission: Time Limits**

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration has been given to an extending the duration of a planning approval for parties who are unable to begin construction due to the recession.

**(AQW 6148/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Department would give consideration to granting planning permission for a longer period of time where an applicant indicates in making a planning application that this may be necessary, and can demonstrate that there are clear and justifiable reasons for doing so. An example of this may be an application for renewable energy development, where additional consents are required to be put in place following issue of planning approval. Requests made in this way would be considered on a case by case basis.

Under current planning legislation, developers who wish to delay the commencement of development may choose to apply for renewal of planning permission as the time limit for implementation of the planning approval approaches.

Developers who do not wish to apply for renewal of planning permission do have the opportunity to commence development on the site in order to implement the planning permission and prevent the permission from lapsing. To assist and provide clarification, my officials have published guidance on this issue 'Guidance on Renewing Planning Permission and Starting Development' which is available to view at DOE Planning Portal. This guidance includes useful examples of when the Department would accept that development has commenced in accordance with the approved planning permission.

I have been considering this issue, including practice in other jurisdictions and the reduction of planning renewal fees (as part of a current review), and will update the Member in due course.

### **Hydraulic Fracturing: Fermanagh**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment, prior to fracking in Fermanagh in the early 2000s, whether baseline samples were taken for air purity, and if so, (a) who tested the samples; (b) where the samples were taken; (c) when the samples were taken; (d) for what the air was tested; and (e) to provide details of the results.

**(AQW 6200/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The exploratory drilling operation in 2002 did not require submission of a planning application. Given this, DOE did not require any additional specific air quality monitoring in respect of the sites involved. However, I am assessing what environmental requirements should be satisfied at each and all stages of the development of this matter.

### Wind Farms: Community Benefits

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has to address the issue of the community benefits of wind farms.

**(AQW 6349/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The provision of community benefits by a windfarm developer are made on a voluntary basis. Moreover, it is apparently the case that developers enter into private arrangements with local landowners. I am aware that an industry group and a community group are both currently developing community benefit protocols. The Sustainable Energy Interdepartmental Working Group will consider these documents and advise if additional government guidance is required, which will also be on the agenda of the next Planning Forum meeting.

### Wind Farms: Community Benefits

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether the community benefits of wind farms will be dealt with through planning reform; and (ii) what action is being taken to address this issue.

**(AQW 6350/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The provision of community benefits by a windfarm developer are made on a voluntary basis. I am aware that an industry group and a community group are both currently developing community benefit protocols and my Department will consider these documents when published, and determine through the Sustainable Energy Interdepartmental Working Group if additional government guidance is required.

It should be noted that one of the aims of planning reform, which will transfer the majority of planning powers to councils, is to ensure that planning supports the future economic and social development needs of Northern Ireland and manages development in a sustainable way. The Planning Act 2011 will 'copper fasten' the sustainable development duty to ensure that all relevant authorities will take into account sustainable development in the decision-making process.

I also intend to meet the Fermanagh Trust in relation to their recent publication on "Community Benefit". I will assess what further measures are needed and desirable to best benefit local communities.

### Planning Policy Statement 5: Timescale

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the timescale for the publication of PPS 5.

**(AQW 6569/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I intend to shortly commence a wider debate on the future of city and town centres and all matters relating to their vitality and viability. I will be announcing my intention to initiate such a debate amongst key stakeholders in the near future. Thereafter, this debate will inform the preparation of a fit for purpose planning policy on retailing and town centres.

In addition, I will soon be announcing my intention to give weight to draft PPS 5.

### Planning Applications: North Down

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for new businesses in the North Down area have been received, in each of the last two financial years.

**(AQW 6612/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** My Department does not have information on the number of planning applications for new businesses that have been submitted. Planning applications specify the applicant's name and address and do not specify whether the applicant is an existing or new business.

### Planning Service: Legal Costs

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of the Environment how much the Planning Service has spent on defending decisions in court in each of the last five years, broken down by divisional planning office.

**(AQW 6802/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The method used to record Judicial Review payments in 2006/07 means that the Department is unable to allocate costs against individual cases and therefore unable to determine how much of the costs related to planning application decisions and how much related to other Judicial Review cases. For this reason costs have been provided for the last four years only.

The table below shows the cost paid by the Department as recorded in the Annual Report and Accounts in relation to judicial reviews on decisions on planning applications broken down by Divisional Planning Office. The total cost paid by the Department in the last four years is £107,986 as of end of March 2011. This includes costs awarded and legal costs.

| Area Office | 2007/08 (£) | 2008/09 (£) | 2009/10 (£) | 2010/11 (£) | Total Costs in last 4 years (£) |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------------|
| Ballymena   | 0           | 0           | 0           | 3,339       | 3,339                           |

| Area Office  | 2007/08 (£) | 2008/09 (£) | 2009/10 (£) | 2010/11 (£) | Total Costs in last 4 years (£) |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------------|
| Belfast      | 0           | 1,697       | 26,680      | 0           | 28,377                          |
| Craigavon    | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0                               |
| Derry        | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0                               |
| Downpatrick  | 0           | 0           | 0           | 6,000       | 6,000                           |
| Headquarters | 0           | 0           | 0           | 39,445      | 39,445                          |
| Omagh        | 0           | 0           | 0           | 30,825      | 30,825                          |
| Total        | 0           | 1,697       | 26,680      | £79,609     | 107,986                         |

The above figures refer to judicial reviews of decisions on planning applications and do not include judicial reviews on procedural issues prior to a final decision on a planning application being made, or judicial reviews of area plans or planning policy.

### Taxi Enforcement: Illegal Operators

**Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to deal with the increasing number of illegal taxis operating without an adequate licence.

**(AQW 7404/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Over the last six months the Driver & Vehicle Agency has increased the number of staff dedicated to taxi enforcement, and a recruitment exercise which will further increase the number of permanent operational staff has also just been completed.

The Agency is currently introducing the second phase of the graduated fixed penalty and deposit scheme, which will enable a more comprehensive range of fixed penalty notices to be issued for taxi related offences. Since the introduction of the scheme in April 2011, a total of 198 fixed penalty tickets have been issued by DVA enforcement officers for taxi related offences, with 101 relating specifically to the use of unlicensed taxis. In addition, a further 57 cases were reported with a view to prosecution.

My Department is also planning to introduce a range of new initiatives under the Taxis Act (NI) 2008 including operator licensing and single-tier licensing. It is anticipated that the changes will allow the activities of the Department's enforcement staff to be redirected towards other forms of illegal activity with greater implications for road safety, customers, business and the environment.

### Driver and Vehicle Agency: Release of Information

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of the Environment to which third parties the Driver and Vehicle Agency is authorised to release vehicle owner details.

**(AQW 7431/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** In relation to the release of information, DVA acts in accordance with the policy set by DfT. The relevant legislation permitting the release of information from the vehicles register is regulation 27 (1) of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) Regulations 2002, which states "(1) The Secretary of State may make any particulars contained in the register available for use - ...

- (a) by a local authority for any purpose connected with the investigation of an offence or of a decriminalised parking contravention;
- (b) by a chief officer of police;
- (c) by a member of the Police Service of Northern Ireland;
- (d) by an officer of Customs and Excise; or
- (e) by any person who can show to the satisfaction of the Secretary of State that he has reasonable cause for wanting the particulars to be made available to him".

Under the policy on the release of data, DVA releases vehicle owner details to PSNI, Councils, HM Revenue and Customs, and to any person showing reasonable cause for needing the information such as car parking enforcement companies, solicitors, finance and insurance companies, mileage verification companies and garages.

### Mound of Down, Downpatrick: Wildlife Survey

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the wildlife species identified in the ground survey carried out at the Mound of Down, Downpatrick.

**(AQW 7437/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The survey at the Mound of Down carried out by wildlife specialists of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency between 13 and 20 January 2012 looked for evidence of protected species including badger, otter, pine marten, Irish hare and

bats. The survey identified the presence of badgers. 27 entrances were found to badger setts, 24 of which were concentrated in four clusters with three isolated entrances. Some rabbit holes were also located.

Scrub clearance works, affecting only about one third of the scrubbed-over banks, were licensed. These were restricted to two areas and avoided all the sett clusters and occupied isolated setts and were timed to be completed prior to the bird nesting season. Some clearance of tall trees was approved in the vicinity of two currently unoccupied sets, though the scrub concealing them was retained.

### **Planning Policy Statement 21: Guidance**

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of the Environment what information or guidance his Department has provided to divisional planning offices about PPS 21 Policy CTY 10 in relation to clustering and integration.

**(AQW 7460/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** In June 2011 I launched a review of how PPS21 was operating in practise. Part of the review sought to ensure that the policies were applied consistently throughout Northern Ireland.

Subsequently, at my request, the Department rolled out training for all planning officers on the implementation of PPS21. This training took place over a three week period last October, at which time approximately 150 staff were trained.

The training covered each of the policies in detail; however it focussed on those areas which gave particular concern. It provided examples of proposals which are acceptable and those which are unacceptable when considered in the context of the relevant policy.

In relation to policy CTY10, examples of poorly sited proposed new dwellings were demonstrated using relevant maps and photographs; equally, examples of well integrated buildings were also shown. Staff were advised how to define a 'cluster'; how to verify the farm ID number and what to do in the absence of such a number.

The trainer also used relevant case law and recent PAC decisions to demonstrate, how in some circumstances, different weight can be attached to policy and other material factors in reaching a balanced planning decision.

In addition to the training sessions, the Department has provided various guidance notes for staff and for members of the public in relation to the implementation of PPS21. Specifically in relation to Policy CTY10, guidance produced relates to the definition of an 'active' farm and to clustering where there are no other buildings on the farm. A copy of this guidance is attached at Annex A and B for your information.

I shall shortly complete the operational review of PPS21 and intend to make a statement to the Assembly in that regard.

#### **Annex A**

##### PPS 21

Advice on the implementation of Policy CTY 10 – Dwellings on Farm - Criterion (c) where there are no buildings on the farm

The above policy in PPS21 will allow for a dwelling to be permitted on an active farm, every 10 years, subject to certain criteria.

Criterion (c) of CTY10 requires that the new building be visually linked or sited to cluster with an established group of buildings on the farm. Policy CTY10 does not make reference to circumstances where the farm holding has no building or group of farm buildings for a dwelling to visually link or cluster with.

PNRD has advised that as applications for a house on a farm without any buildings was considered by DARD to be a rare occurrence no references were made to this situation in the final document.

Therefore, for the purposes of determining applications where there are no buildings on the farm, the site should comply with policies CTY13(a-f), CTY14 and CTY16, similar to applications where an alternative site is being considered under criterion (c)

Where there is one building on the farm holding, the farm dwelling should cluster with that building unless it is considered as an exceptional case for an alternative site in which case policies CTY13(a-f), CTY14 and CTY16 apply.

Planning Service Headquarters  
September 2010

#### **Annex B**

##### PPS 21

Advice on the implementation of Policy CTY 10 – Dwellings on Farms – Active Farmers

The above policy in PPS 21 will allow a dwelling to be permitted on an active farm, every 10 years subject to certain criteria.

Criterion (c) of Policy CTY 10 operates with a presumption that the dwelling is sited to either visually link or cluster with an established group of buildings on the farm.

As an exception, consideration will be given to an alternative site away from other buildings on the farm where there are either, demonstrable health and safety reasons, or verifiable plans to expand the farm business at the existing group of buildings.

In this respect the applicant will be required to submit appropriate supporting evidence demonstrating to the satisfaction of Planning Service that it is not appropriate or feasible to position the dwelling in close proximity to existing buildings on the farm. Such evidence may include a report from an independent consultant.

Given the site specific element within this policy, prospective applicants and their agents are strongly encouraged to consider carefully matters such as site selection, particularly where an alternative site away from existing buildings is proposed, including the substance of any supporting evidence. Note: The policy also allows for the selection of a well landscaped site adjacent to a building group on a farm where there is a degree of visual linkage.

Prospective applicants should NOT make any direct approaches to either Environmental Health or the Health & Safety Executive NI in advance of making their application. Planning Service will consult with all relevant statutory bodies / agencies where appropriate.

### **Car Parks: Operating Illegally in Belfast**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the (i) number of illegal car parks currently operating in Belfast; and (ii) what action his Department has taken, since 2007, to address this problem.

**(AQW 7504/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:**

- 1) The Department is currently investigating 17 car parks which are operating without planning permission in Belfast.
- 2) Since 2007 the Department has investigated over 50 cases in relation to unauthorised car parks in Belfast. Of these 17 cases are still under investigation.
  - 9 have been closed due to immunity in that they were operating for more than 10 years prior to the complaint being received.
  - 9 have been approved on a permanent basis or with a temporary permission. Of these, 3 were approved by the Planning Appeals Commission.
  - 13 have been closed due to enforcement action and the use of the site as a car park has ceased.

Of the remaining 17, 6 remain under negotiation while the rest are awaiting the outcome of planning applications or appeals. My enforcement team remain committed to actively pursuing these breaches of planning control.

### **Properties: Upkeep of Vacant Residences**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to compel owners of empty residential properties to maintain the exterior of the property at a reasonable standard of upkeep, so as not to infringe on the value of neighbouring properties.

**(AQW 7526/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The upkeep of empty residential property, so as not to detract from the property value of other residences, is not currently subject to any statutory controls under Northern Ireland's environmental or planning law. I have been considering how to better manage sites where development has not commenced or has commenced but subsequently abandoned. I will address the issue of empty residential property in this context.

### **Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan**

**Mr Givan** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the cost and the length of time it has taken to produce the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

**(AQW 7535/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The preparation of BMAP was formally initiated by the Minister of the Environment, Sam Foster MLA on 10 January 2001, and a notice of intention to prepare the Plan was published in February 2001. An Issues Paper was published in December 2001, followed by the Draft Plan in November 2004, and a Plan Amendment in February 2006.

The Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) was asked to conduct a public inquiry in order to consider the objections to the Draft Plan and the Plan Amendment. The Inquiry commenced in April 2007 and concluded in May 2008.

During the period from 21 January 2009 to 31 January 2012, the PAC Reports on the BMAP Public Inquiry have been delivered to my Department in a piecemeal manner. All outstanding reports have now been received over three and a half years since the conclusion of the public inquiry. This delay has impacted on the progress towards the adoption of BMAP.

To date, the cost to my Department of producing the Plan has been in the region of £9 million.

### **Listed Buildings: Grant Aid**

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration his Department has given to paying grant aid for work on listed buildings directly to contractors, so that householders and businesses do not have to acquire finance before the grant aid is paid.

**(AQW 7553/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) administers the listed building grant-aid scheme on behalf of the department, and has around 200 'live' schemes on its database at any time. In general, particular schemes are administered by an owner's architect/consultant, who has the responsibility of 'project managing' the works, in accordance with a separate contract/agreement between the owner and the builder; this role includes the method and frequency of payment.

The department is a third party to this, and is a partial funder for the overall works; in general up to 35% is provided for the cost of repairs to original fabric. Current consideration has not been given to paying contractors directly (as part of the ongoing review of the grant-aid scheme), as it has been concluded that the current system of payment on production of receipted accounts, provides a clear audit trail on behalf of the public purse, and ensures the department is not involved in potential contractual disputes - between the owner and the builder - for the overall project.

### Recruitment Agencies: DOE Spend

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the amount paid to recruitment agencies for (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time posts in his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 7648/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The table below details the amount paid to recruitment agencies covering the period 2008-09 to 2010-11.

| Business Area  | 2008/09<br>£ | 2009/10<br>£ | 2010/11<br>£ |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Department (excluding agencies)                                    | 0            | 209,921      | 310,584      |
| Northern Ireland Environment Agency                                | 1,936,120    | 2,430,584    | 842,292      |
| Planning Service   | 0            | 7,269        | 0            |
| Driver and Vehicle Agency  | 892,210      | 1,503,374    | 1,227,822    |
| Arms-Length Bodies (NILGOSC and Local Government Staff Commission) | 8,995        | 14,118       | 35,598       |
| Total  | 2,837,325    | 4,165,266    | 2,416,296    |

The information held on the accounting system does not distinguish between full time and part time posts. To obtain this information would require an extensive manual analysis of all payments to recruitment agencies over the three year period and therefore could not be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

The Department uses recruitment agencies to fill a range of posts for a number of reasons. In some cases, it is necessary to recruit agency staff to cover posts on a temporary basis due to staff transfers, maternity leave, secondments, etc., or where there may be uncertainty regarding the availability of adequate budget cover in the forward years to pay for the recurring salary costs of staff. It is also beneficial for the Department to be able to flex its workforce requirements where demand for services may fluctuate, for example in the driver and vehicle testing function, or where specific, short-term programmes or projects need to be taken forward.

However, I have asked for a review of these costs, particularly DVA and NIEA, given their scale. I shall update the member in due course.

### Housing Developments: Private Streets Determination

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the number of roads in private housing developments that are incomplete as a result of developers being in financial difficulties, whether he will consider reviewing the planning process in relation to this matter.

**(AQW 7746/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** A Private Streets Determination is carried out in conjunction with DRD Roads Service prior to granting full planning permission for a housing development. This will be subject to a private streets condition stating that the width, position and arrangement of the internal streets shall be as indicated on the Private Streets Determination drawing.

The key legislation that governs the eventual adoption of new roads in housing developments are the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980 and the Private Streets (Amendment) (NI) order 1992. This legislation requires developers to make provision for the cost of street works and to secure that by means of a bond.

The process of seeking the bond is carried out by DRD Roads Service and follows the grant of planning permission.

The current private streets legislation and procedures are the means of ensuring that new roads in housing developments are built to appropriate standards and hence adopted into the public road network when they are completed. I will however keep this matter under review.

### Councils: Transition Committees

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to put Transition Committees on a legislative footing, given the amount of time that it will take such Committees to assess and address the issues relevant to the merging of councils.

**(AQW 7779/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** In moving forward, I would propose to have Transition Committees established in statute in May 2013 to enable them to deliver a range of activities in advance of the establishment of Shadow Councils in June 2014.

However, I am writing to councils now about the re-establishment of the Voluntary Transition Committees by March 2012. This should allow convergence work to commence shortly on addressing local issues in council groupings.

The Statutory Transition Committees will, in due course, become responsible for taking forward the practical work developed during the voluntary process.

### Planning Applications: Delays

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment why delays in processing planning applications continues when the total number of applications received by his Department continues to fall and application fees have increased.

**(AQW 7824/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Since becoming Minister, I have commenced a radical reform of planning in order to reduce delays in processing applications and require active case management and other interventions to ensure applications are processed in a more timely manner. These include a further extension of the streamlined consultation scheme and proactively managing renewable applications. I meet with planning senior management monthly to discuss Article 31 applications and this has already borne fruit as last month I was able to dispose of five major applications including the approval of three. I intend to accelerate this with further approvals in February and forthcoming months.

There are a number of reasons for delays in processing planning applications mainly due to the redeployment of planning and administrative staff due to a reduction in income from planning application fee receipts. This has led to reallocation of cases to remaining staff and increase in case loads. This is a legacy I inherited – but which I have been addressing. That said, the backlog of applications is continuing to reduce but inevitably the average and percentile timescale for processing will lengthen as decisions are issued on more older applications. I have developed a workforce planning model in order to build a planning system that is more fit for purpose and provide decisions on planning applications in a timely manner, subject to finance being available.

My objective is to have planning on a more sustainable funding model before the transfer of functions to the new local authorities and have asked officials to progress stage 2 of the review of planning fees review. I consider it is right that the development industry covers the cost of processing of their applications but recognise that more timely decision making is required. I will therefore include more challenging targets for processing applications in the Departmental business plan for next year.

I also would urge applicants to engage with my planners and local communities at an early stage, and to submit high quality applications accompanied by all of the information and surveys necessary to allow it to be determined as quickly as possible.

### Listed Buildings: Penalties

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration his Department has given to allowing discretion in the imposition of variable penalties on those held responsible for the incorrect maintenance of listed buildings which are (i) private homes; (ii) commercial premises; and (iii) public buildings.

**(AQW 7845/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Department has a range of powers and controls to protect listed buildings which, if breached, constitute an offence regardless of whether the building is used for private, commercial or public use.

Penalties are normally set as a maximum in terms of the level of a fine or a term of imprisonment, although conviction on indictment for an offence under Article 44(6) (b) may involve an unlimited fine. Decisions on the level of fine or term of imprisonment are matters for the courts and not the Department.

The Planning Act (NI) 2011 introduced an increase maximum on summary conviction under Article 44(6) (a) (control of works for demolition, alteration or extension of listed buildings) from £30,000 to £100,000.

The Department is committed to investigating breaches of planning control for both listed and non-listed buildings and where such breaches cannot be suitably resolved informally then, where it is expedient to do so, the Department will take formal enforcement action including prosecution through the courts.

### Listed Buildings: Incentives

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration his Department has given to incentivising owner occupancy of listed buildings as commercial premises.

**(AQW 7846/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The department has considered incentivising owner occupancy of listed buildings as commercial premises. However, DOE does not have the relevant vires. Its key statutory objective is to secure the conservation of the character of listed buildings



which it does in accord with current policy. It remains flexible in considering various uses, or re-use - including those with adaptation - that best fulfil this objective.

The department's listed building grant-aid scheme is available for the repair and maintenance of historic fabric for most listed buildings, in keeping with the legislation; large commercial organisations are ineligible.

In addition, NIEA's conservation architects provide advice and guidance to owners on the upkeep of their buildings, and, where appropriate, seek to encourage a 'meanwhile use' for vacant listed buildings.

The department's grant-aid scheme also provides funding assistance to help with the acquisition of listed buildings at risk by Building Preservation Trusts (BPTs). Many BPTs have a proven track record of saving, conserving and reusing such properties - including for commercial activities - in a sensitive and sustainable way. However, I have been considering how Government may better use listed buildings as part of the Government Estate, thereby helping to maintain the fabric of listed properties.

### Listed Buildings: Incentives

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration his Department has given to incentivising owner occupancy of listed buildings as private homes.

**(AQW 7847/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I refer you to my answer to AQW 7846/11-15, which is relevant here.

### Equality Unit

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Equality Unit.

**(AQW 7892/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:**

- (i) The Department currently employs two staff in its Equality Unit – one Deputy Principal and one Staff Officer;
- (ii) The current total annual cost to the Department of these 2 staff is £84,000.

### Questions for Written Answer: Stationery Costs

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on stationery costs in replying to Assembly Written Questions, including the price of the envelopes and paper used, in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 7958/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The table below provides details in relation to the estimated costs of stationery incurred over the last four years in replying to Assembly Questions.

| Financial Year | Total Cost (£) |
|----------------|----------------|
| 2007-08        | 136.64         |
| 2008-09        | 205.76         |
| 2009-10        | 148.16         |
| 2010-11        | 119.20         |

The costs of stationery are not captured separately from other types of expenditure, however, to provide the Member with a response to this question, the Department has calculated the average cost of stationery for answering an Assembly Question and applied this to the number of questions answered in each year. The average cost of stationery for an Assembly Question has been estimated at £0.16p.

It is only possible to provide the Member with estimated costs over the last four years as the Department does not have access to records prior to May 2007 for the number of assembly questions. The total number of Assembly Questions includes written, oral and part input. It is not possible to distinguish between the three types of question. However, the total amount of oral and part input questions would be negligible.

### Vehicle Tax

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of the Environment how many (i) motorcycles; (ii) scooters; and (iii) motor-trikes are currently taxed for road use.

**(AQW 7965/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Vehicle licensing is an excepted matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport. It is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency under an agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport.

There are a number of body type categories that relate to motorcycles and tricycles, so the response below details the number of vehicles currently licensed in each of the categories at 31 December 2011.

| Vehicle Type  | Number Currently Licensed |
|---|---------------------------|
| Motorcycle  | 23,809                    |
| Scooter   | 2,361                     |
| Tricycle  | 255                       |
| Moped   | 2,327                     |
| Motorcycle Combination (ie a motorcycle with a sidecar) | 17                        |

### Hydraulic Fracturing: Tamboran Resources Ltd

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) all of the chemicals and metals that are underground in the area licensed to Tamboran for gas exploration; (ii) the potential impact that the displacement of these chemicals and metals would have on the local environment and residents; and (iii) whether this will be taken into consideration as part of the planning process. **(AQW 8032/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The soils, superficial sediments and rocks that underlie the area of Tamboran Resources' petroleum licence contain a wide range of minerals and organic matter containing many different elements and compounds. There is no reason to believe that there are high concentrations of potentially toxic metals in the rocks of this area. Ongoing scientific research will build the evidence base in this regard.

Where material has been introduced into the sub-surface by means of drilling operations, or where hazardous materials are naturally occurring, the risk of these materials coming into contact with the surface or near-surface environment, as a result of drilling and associated operations, will be considered as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment appropriate to any part of this operation.

In terms of their role in the consultation process NIEA will assess existing groundwater data and where necessary carry out additional groundwater monitoring to establish an environmental baseline for groundwater quality once planning applications are received and the exact location of a proposed hydraulic fracturing operation is known. I am currently assessing the scale of environmental regime for any exploratory drilling.

I have met with representatives of Tamboran Resources and made it clear to that I will uphold the most rigorous Environmental Impact Assessment in relation to this matter. Tamboran have accepted the need for such assessments and to liaise with both Strategic Planning Division and NIEA in scoping the content of the required Environmental Statement.

Liaison will continue at both Ministerial and Official level with our counterparts in the South who will be dealing with the same type of planning applications and environmental impact issues.

### Hydraulic Fracturing: Environmental Impact Assessments

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether he is satisfied that any Environmental Impact Assessment that will be carried out prior to hydraulic fracturing taking place will be carried out by a properly qualified, independent and impartial organisation with the necessary expertise; and (ii) whether he would consider ordering an independent public inquiry into the potential use of fracking before it reaches the stage where planning permission is required. **(AQW 8033/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I have made it clear – including in a meeting with Tamboran – that all appropriate environmental requirements will be complied with at all times.

In terms of any planning applications submitted by Tamboran Resources involving hydraulic fracturing the responsibility is on the company to provide a full and proper Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to support their application.

I have also made it clear to Tamboran Resources that I expect the most rigorous EIA to form the basis of the Departments determination of any future planning application taking account of all potential impacts on the environment and public health. The EIA will be the subject of very careful consideration by the Strategic Planning Division with the assistance and expert advice from a range of other consultees with responsibilities for environmental protection and public health and safety.

As I have already stated in a previous answer on the subject of public inquiries the Department has various powers to call a public inquiry or independent examination in public should it consider necessary to do so. I will carefully consider this option as events, research and my assessment unfolds.

Generally the need for a public inquiry or independent examination in public in relation to a planning application emerges through consultation responses and public representations where issues raised cannot be satisfactorily dealt with through the normal development management process. However, as I have said, I will consider this option as information, evidence with the North, on the island and beyond develops.

## Planning Approval: Against NIEA Advice

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment on how many occasions planning approval has been granted against the advice of the Environment Agency in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 8145/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Planning legislation states that a decision on planning application is made having regard to the development plan and other material considerations. The guiding principle that DoE Planning observe in making decisions on planning applications is set out in Planning Policy Statement 1 'General Principles'. This states that development should be permitted, having regard to the development plan and all other material considerations, unless it would cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance.

DoE, as the planning authority, may ask for advice from a number of other agencies and organisations to inform the decision on an application. This can include other parts of the DOE such as the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). Advice from NIEA officials will normally be sought on matters relating to built and natural heritage issues, water quality and land and resource management.

The advice provided by NIEA officials, and other consultees is one of a number of factors to be considered in reaching a balanced decision in any planning application. In making a decision where there are different priorities and policies the courts have held that the assessment of weight is a matter for the decision maker and therefore rests with the planning authority. Accordingly it is for DoE Planning as decision-maker to exercise its judgement in determining the balance of considerations. This is critical – it is for DOE Planning or, in the case of Article 31 applications, for the DOE Minister to make the decision.

Table 1, shows the number of planning applications approved in the last five years where advice provided by NIEA officials was an objection to the proposal or recommended refusal. However, in instances where NIEA officials record their advice as being 'approval/refusal', this should not be confused with the DoE Planning role as decision-maker, where it is required to reach a balanced and informed decision taking account of all material factors, including the opinions of its consultees.

**Table 1**

| Year Decision Issued | Consultation Response (Objection) | Consultation Response (Refusal Recommended) | Total      |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|---|------------|
| 07-08                | 8                                 | 9   | 17         |
| 08-09                | 28                                | 19  | 47         |
| 09-10                | 40                                | 22  | 62         |
| 10-11                | 12                                | 22  | 34         |
| 11-12                | 4                                 | 41  | 45         |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>92</b>                         | <b>113</b>                                  | <b>205</b> |

**Source:** DOE Planning

**Notes:** Figures quoted may differ from officially published statistics and may be subject to revision

In all cases where the advice from NIEA officials was not given determining weight it was because other material considerations outweighed that advice and, after due consideration the Department decided that permission should be granted.

## Residential Properties: Flood Plains

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of the Environment how many homes are built on flood plains.

**(AQW 8228/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Historically many cities and towns in Britain and Ireland, have been built in valleys and along river corridors and thus have resulted in increased flood risk. The Department recognises that the effects of flooding on human activity are wide ranging, impacting on the economy, social well being and the environment.

However, the planning system cannot in itself prevent the flooding of properties but it does acknowledge the risks and uncertainties associated with climate change. The Department considers that actions to address these matters through the planning system should be based on a precautionary approach. This approach is embodied in the policies set out in Planning Policy Statement 15 'Planning and Flood Risk' to ensure that the development decisions we make today and in the future does not increase flood risk.

The Department does not capture information in relation to the number of dwellings proposed or approved on flood plains or monitor the commencement or completion of building works. However, it has consulted with Rivers Agency in relation to almost 4,500 planning applications on sites which are located in an area of known flood risk in the last 5 years. The Department also consults with Rivers Agency when a development plan is being prepared to ensure that such plans do not bring forward sites or zone land that may be susceptible to flooding, unless there are exceptional circumstances, or it is considered appropriate to put mitigation measures in place.

## Advanced Driving Test

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of the Environment how many drivers have passed the Advanced Driving Test in each of the last three years; and how this figure, as a percentage, compares with other UK regions.

**(AQW 8230/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) carries out statutory driving tests in Northern Ireland on behalf of the Department under the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 and the Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996.

Advanced driving tests both in NI and in Britain are carried out by private organisations. The main providers are the Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA), and they have provided the tabulated statistics below for advanced driving tests.

### Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM)

| Category   | 2008-2009 |           |              | 2009-2010 |           |              | 2010-2011 |           |              |
|------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
|            | Tests     | Pass Rate | No of Passes | Tests     | Pass Rate | No of Passes | Tests     | Pass Rate | No of Passes |
| NI         |           |           |              |           |           |              |           |           |              |
| Car        | 201       | 98%       | 199          | 114       | 96%       | 109          | 81        | 98%       | 79           |
| Motorcycle | 16        | 88%       | 14           | 32        | 97%       | 31           | 34        | 100%      | 34           |
| Britain    |           |           |              |           |           |              |           |           |              |
| Car        | 8376      | 92%       | 7706         | 4314      | 89%       | 3839         | 3004      | 86%       | 2583         |
| Motorcycle | 2027      | 87%       | 1763         | 1874      | 86%       | 1612         | 1785      | 86%       | 1535         |

Source: Institute of Advanced Motorists (not Official Statistics)

### Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

| Category   | 2008-2009 |           |              | 2009-2010 |           |              | 2010-2011 |           |              |
|------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
|            | Tests     | Pass Rate | No of Passes | Tests     | Pass Rate | No of Passes | Tests     | Pass Rate | No of Passes |
| NI         |           |           |              |           |           |              |           |           |              |
| Car        | 101       | 100%      | 101          | 88        | 100%      | 88           | 70        | 100%      | 70           |
| Motorcycle | 8         | 100%      | 8            | 19        | 100%      | 19           | 15        | 100%      | 15           |
| England    |           |           |              |           |           |              |           |           |              |
| Car        | 1850      | 98.7%     | 1826         | 1844      | 98.5%     | 1816         | 2097      | 99%       | 2076         |
| Motorcycle | 433       | 98.6%     | 427          | 441       | 99%       | 437          | 572       | 99%       | 566          |
| Scotland   |           |           |              |           |           |              |           |           |              |
| Car        | 144       | 100%      | 144          | 126       | 99.2%     | 125          | 170       | 99.4%     | 169          |
| Motorcycle | 26        | 100%      | 26           | 37        | 100%      | 37           | 20        | 100%      | 20           |
| Wales      |           |           |              |           |           |              |           |           |              |
| Car        | 74        | 100%      | 74           | 54        | 98.2%     | 53           | 73        | 100%      | 73           |
| Motorcycle | 28        | 100%      | 28           | 50        | 100%      | 50           | 53        | 94.3%     | 50           |

**Source:** Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (not Official Statistics)

The statistics provided by the IAM and RoSPA indicate that over the three years in question 20,484 drivers passed the advanced driving test in Britain compared with 646 in NI while for motorcyclists 6,551 riders passed the advanced test in Britain and 121 in NI.

The numbers of advanced tests taken with the IAM and RoSPA in this period totalled, for cars, 22,126 in Britain and 655 in NI, and, for motorcycles, 7,346 in Britain and 124 in NI. For car tests, the figures for both Britain and NI represented 0.4% of the numbers of ordinary practical driving tests taken by motorists in the same period, while advanced motorcycle tests represented 3.3% of the number of ordinary motorcycle tests taken in Britain and 2.1% of the number taken in NI.

## Fuel: DOE Spend

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department, and its agencies, have spent on fuel in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 8249/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The table below provides details of expenditure by the Department, for the years in question, on vehicle fuel (both petrol and diesel for cars, vans, lorries and boats).

| Business Area                       | 2006/07<br>£   | 2007/08<br>£   | 2008/09<br>£   | 2009/10<br>£   | 2010/11<br>£   |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Driver and Vehicle Agency           | 21,484         | 17,988         | 29,826         | 28,107         | 31,565         |
| Northern Ireland Environment Agency | 120,573        | 136,714        | 168,842        | 173,160        | 187,957        |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>142,057</b> | <b>154,702</b> | <b>198,668</b> | <b>201,267</b> | <b>219,522</b> |

The increase in spend between 2007/08 and 2008/09 is largely due to the purchase of 26 additional vehicles, including larger 4x4s for use on agricultural land, by Northern Ireland Environment Agency to enhance enforcement and environmental regulation activities in relation to environmental crime, landfill site monitoring and water sampling. In addition, we have seen significant increases in the price of fuel, with the cost of diesel increasing by some 23% between 2008 and 2010.

## Historic Buildings: Survey Costs

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration his Department has given to reducing the costs related to the surveying of historic buildings.

**(AQW 8259/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) currently has two contracts to undertake surveys of historic buildings. A three year, area based, contract to survey specific council areas - as part of the Second Survey programme, and a three year ad-hoc record contract to survey 'one-off' buildings, not least in response to the service of Building Preservation Notices etc.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report of March 2011 ('Safeguarding Northern Ireland's Listed Buildings' (see attached)) reported that the average cost to survey a historic building, as part of the Second Survey, was £310, and the average cost to survey a historic building as a 'one off' to the same level of detail, for example as a result of a request from a member of the public, or their elected representative, was £753.

The difference between the two rates is because it is much more efficient to survey buildings in groups where historical research can be shared, and to do this in a designated area, where travel and time efficiencies can be maximised. Most of NIEA's survey work is therefore concentrated on 'area based' surveys, and surveys of 'one off' records are minimised as much as possible.

The Second Survey commenced in 1997, with a contract through which consultants were paid by the hour for their survey work.

Over the last five years, ie since 2006/07 the Survey process has been reviewed comprehensively and a new contract arrangement introduced. This sought a price for an expected number of buildings within a designated area. This was tested in 2008 and 2009, before the current three year contract was let in 2010.

The new contracts also sought to reduce the total number of buildings surveyed by around 30%, in a bid to increase efficiency, and speed up the progress of the work. This has resulted in the greatest cost saving in relation to the Second Survey, and work is concentrated on buildings with a high potential to be listed. Data from the first ten years of the survey allowed an estimate to be made of the number of new records to be expected, which relates to the number of existing listed buildings in an area. This approach has been reasonably successful. Of the 7 full council areas surveyed since 2008, two - Omagh and Newtownabbey - have been, significantly, in excess of the expected number of surveys, but most have been within a margin of error of 10% of the tendered figure.

NIEA Conservation Architects now meet with the contractors, after they have undertaken a 'scoping' of an area, to omit any surveys that are considered unnecessary. This requires more meetings (ie staff time etc), but ensures greater efficiency for the money spent and is expected to further reduce the number of surveys undertaken.

Partial surveys (known as D1 records) have also been introduced. In the area survey, the Department seeks to update records of structures which have a reference number from previous survey work. Where it is clear that a structure is not 'listable', a single photograph and minimal information is recorded, at c1/10 of the cost of a full survey.

The scale of work can also have an impact on cost as there will be a higher relative cost to a contractor to assemble a team for a short period of time rather than for a long one. This may, in part, explain why the first test contract of 2008 for a single council area cost £540 per record, whereas the second test contract of 2009/10 for the equivalent of two council areas cost only £351 per record (a reduction of 35%). The average cost per record under the current contract is £350. These costs per record are taken from the NIAO report.

In regard to the survey, the NIAO report recommended: '...that improved arrangements built into the current contract for targeting survey work and managing throughput of work within NIEA are reflected in all future contracts for the remainder of the survey

process.' And 'We recommend that NIEA builds on its procedures for the current contract by formally prioritising for survey those buildings that are most at risk. We also recommend that decisions on the approach to be taken after the current contract expires in 2013 are based on a through appraisal of a range of relevant, fully costed options, to ensure that future survey work delivers value for money.'

NIEA will take account of these recommendations prior to any retendering. This tendering work will also be undertaken in association with the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) within DFP which also seeks to reduce costs (and ensure quality etc) in accord with government practice.

In May 2011 the budget for the survey was reduced from £320K to £60K, as a result of the widespread financial cut backs at the time. However, although work in 2011/12 began on a reduced basis, the transfer of additional funding, in-year, returned the annual budget to £324K which resulted in the projected systematic survey work being completed in full, and allowed for some ad hoc surveys – on buildings that were adjudged to be 'at risk' of loss of character – in other areas.

## Derry City Area Plan

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of the Environment when the new Area Plan for the Derry City Council area will be completed. (AQW 8294/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** Consideration is currently being given to the best mechanisms for both working with and empowering Councils to participate in Plan production over the run up to the Reform of Public Administration.

Until such time as a new area plan is prepared under the provisions of PPS:1 General Principals (paragraph 45) the existing Plan continues to be a material consideration past its stated end by date, to the extent that policies and proposals remain applicable to current circumstance. At present Derry has a generous supply of development land, with existing permissions and housing zonings providing potential for 9973 dwellings in Derry City and 1750 dwellings in the Districts remaining settlements. However the Department will continue to monitor the situation and if a need arises then remedial action will be taken.

## Buses: Consumption of Alcohol

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration is being given to banning the consumption of alcohol on all private hire buses and vehicles. (AQW 8379/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** Regulation 51(1)(k) of the Public Service Vehicle Regulations (NI) 1985 makes it an offence for a passenger on a public service vehicle to consume alcohol. The Police Service of Northern Ireland has primary responsibility for the enforcement of this regulation.

I am very concerned about the consumption of alcohol on buses and am currently considering additional means by which to deal with this issue, as I am aware that the current legislation creates an offence for members of the public but not for the operator or driver of the vehicle. My assessment covers a number of issues.

Firstly, the ongoing review of bus operator licensing is considering the introduction of legislation that would require operators and those using bus services to ensure that alcohol is carried separately from passengers. When this proposal was consulted on in 2010 many respondents suggested that a blanket ban on alcohol would be more effective but a number of respondents raised concerns over the responsibility placed on operators and drivers, without the power to search people boarding a bus.

Secondly, the Department is looking at how blanket bans on alcohol on buses have been delivered both here in Northern Ireland (before sporting events) and in Scotland, with a view to considering making similar wide ranging legislation as part of the ongoing review of bus regulation.

Thirdly, I have recently set up a Bus Forum to fully engage with industry representatives and stakeholders such as the PSNI. One of the key tasks of the Forum will be to consider and make recommendations on the most appropriate means of dealing with the consumption of alcohol on buses.

Fourth, my officials are working with officials in DHSSPS as part of their Alcohol in the Night Time Economy working group. This group is looking at the whole issue of alcohol consumption in Northern Ireland and their findings will help to inform decision making on the control of alcohol in the transport industries.

Fifth, I have called in a range of bus operators to confirm concern of the issue and assess how best to go forward. The meeting was held on 14 March 2012.

## Waste Management

**Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the benefits for waste management of single thermal treatment, or gasification facilities, for municipal waste, located within each of the three current waste management organisation's boundaries; and what annual tonnage capacity he envisages that each facility would be required to handle. (AQW 8387/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** Energy from waste, whether through incineration, gasification or other technology, is a tightly regulated means of treating the residual waste remaining after as many recyclates as is practicable have been extracted from the waste collected by municipal authorities through either kerbside or bluebin collection and Mechanical Biological Treatment. Each of the three Waste

Management Groups has gone through a rigorous process of assessment to identify the solutions that it believes best meets the waste management needs of its constituent councils.

The main benefits of the Waste Management Groups' preferred solutions are the reduction of waste going to landfill and the 5-7% contribution that front-end processing (Mechanical and Biological Treatment) would make to our overall recycling figures. It is vital that we achieve our landfill diversion targets if we are to avoid heavy infraction fines from the EU. The energy from waste (EfW) component of each project has the potential to power district heating schemes or to be fed back into the main electricity grid, thereby reducing the use of fossil fuels and bringing us closer to our stated goal of becoming a low carbon economy. Beyond the specific benefits to waste management, the projects will also create jobs in both their construction and operational phases.

The Waste Management Groups have calculated that their respective Contract tonnages will be as follows:

arc21 c. 240,000 – 250,000 tonnes per annum

NWRWMG c. 120,000 tonnes per annum

SWaMP2008 c. 140,000 – 160,000 tonnes per annum.

### Planning Approval: Parkgate Quarry

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of the Environment whether a full hydrological study will be a precondition in the possible planning approval for Parkgate quarry.

**(AQW 8480/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** In terms of any possible approval for the proposal at Parkgate Quarry a hydrogeological survey will be required but not as a precondition of planning permission as it is not the role of planning permission to impose conditions to achieve the purposes of a separate system of control.

This facility will require both the grant of planning permission and also the grant of a permit licence under the Pollution Prevention Control regulatory regime, in order that it may be lawfully regulated and operated. A full and robust hydrogeological study will be required by NIEA in the granting of any such licence for the operation of this site.

### Listed Buildings: Vacant in Belfast City Centre

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has an action plan for the following vacant listed heritage buildings in the Belfast City Centre area (i) University Road Methodist Church; (ii) Kitchen Bar, 1 Victoria Square; (iii) Carlisle Memorial Methodist Church; (iv) Crumlin Road Courthouse; (v) Crumlin Road Jail; (vi) Bank of Ireland, Royal Avenue; (vii) Assembly Rooms, Donegall Street; (viii) Ewart Building Bedford Street; (ix) Riddell Warehouse; (x) Harland and Wolff HQ and drawing office; (xi) Musgrave Street Police Station; (xii) St Joseph's Church Sailortown; (xiii) Ormiston House; (xiv) Donegall Arcade and associated buildings; (xv) Victoria Hall, May Street; (xvi) St George's Market; (xvii) Linen Warehouse, Bedford Street; (xviii) Linen HQ Bedford Street; and (xix) Jordanstown Schools.

**(AQW 8483/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** It is for owners who are responsible for the maintenance and security of individual buildings to develop plans for the building.

In relation to the category of 'Buildings at Risk' DOE seeks to highlight the issues faced by such buildings in general, by publishing the Built Heritage at Risk in Northern Ireland (BHARNI) register. It makes assistance available through its listed building grant-aid funding for the repair of original fabric, and by providing funds for voluntary groups and charities to help them to acquire, and find sustainable uses for, listed buildings at risk. The department's Conservation Architects also engage with owners, to advise on appropriate conservation, the availability of funding, and where appropriate, potential new usages for buildings. In addition, funding is provided to the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society (UAHS) that employs a surveyor as a 'Built Heritage at Risk Project Officer' to work with owners, and make them aware of potential solutions.

In certain cases where engagement is not producing results and the listed building's condition is deteriorating, the department issues warning letters, advising of the statutory powers available to the Department to arrest further decline. During 2011-12, three Urgent Works Notices have been served, requiring that works to secure buildings are undertaken; where the owner has failed to act, the department has carried out the works, and can seek recovery of costs.

Of the buildings listed in the question, some are not regarded as being 'at risk' - eg - (xvi), St George's Market. Further buildings, such as (ii), the Kitchen Bar, and (xi), Musgrave Street Police Station, are not listed.

The Department has had engagement with owners of many of the other buildings in recent years, to seek a sustainable future, although the economic downturn has meant that schemes approved for a new use - ie - (i), University Road, Bedford Street; (x), the Harland and Wolff HQ and drawing office; (iv), the Crumlin Road Courthouse; and, (vi), Bank of Ireland, Royal Avenue, have not proceeded. Other schemes, such as (vii), the Assembly Rooms, Donegall Street, and (xv), Victoria Hall (which was delisted in 1989) are subject to current planning applications.

The NIEA Built Heritage Directorate is reviewing all of the buildings on the Built Heritage at Risk database, in conjunction with the UAHS Heritage Officer, to prioritise action.

### Planning: Enforcement Cases

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of the Environment, excluding the Downpatrick Planning Office, to detail the number of (i) enforcement cases; and (ii) staff tasked to deal with these cases in each divisional planning office.

**(AQW 8579/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Excluding the Downpatrick Planning Office, the number of (i) enforcement cases; and (ii) staff tasked to deal with these cases in each divisional planning office is set out in the table below.

| Divisional Office    | (i) Number of Live Enforcement Cases as of 23 February 2012 | (ii) Number of Staff |           |
|----------------------|---|----------------------|-----------|
|                      |   | Full Time            | Part time |
| Belfast              | 421   | 3                    | 0         |
| Ballymena            | 288   | 4                    | 0         |
| Craigavon            | 426   | 4                    | 1         |
| Northern - Derry     | 230   | 2                    | 1         |
| Northern - Coleraine | 230   | 2                    | 3         |
| Omagh                | 310   | 4                    | 0         |
| Headquarters         | 339   | 3                    | 2         |
| Total                | 3581  | 22                   | 7         |

There are also 10 senior officers at PPTO (Principal Planner) grade who manage the enforcement teams combined with their other duties in Development Management. They have not been included in the figures.

Planning Management acknowledges the disparity in live caseloads throughout the Divisional Planning Offices and has been taking action to address resource issues. This has required the movement of staff in a number of local offices to help equalise case loads across all offices with minimum disruption to service and inconvenience to staff. Senior Management will continue to review caseloads and redeploy staff as necessary.

### Driver and Vehicle Agency: Mobile Units

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 6451/11-15, to detail (i) the areas where the units operated; (ii) the number of successful detections; and (iii) the cost of operating the three mobile units, including staff wages.  
**(AQW 8799/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** On 26 December 2011 the Agency's three mobile units were operating on the A2 Holywood by-pass, at Castle Street, Ballymoney, and on the A4 at Augher, Co Tyrone. The mobile units detected a total of 114 vehicles during the three operations in question, and the costs involved, including staff wages, were estimated at £536.66.

### Listed Buildings: Private Homes

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number and percentage of listed buildings that are occupied as private homes.

**(AQW 8821/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Department is unable to provide information in the form that you have requested.

It may help if I explain that the focus of listing is on buildings, and they are identified by their address and location – rather than through ownership - which is subject to change, without the need for Departmental consent, and for which there is no legal requirement currently for the Department to hold records.

General correspondence issuing from the Department is, as a result, addressed to the 'owner/occupier', although specific named individuals are referred to in response to correspondence with owner/occupiers who identify themselves to us.

That noted, information available from within the Northern Ireland Environment Agency databases indicates that about 50% of all listed properties are categorised as 'houses'.

### Hydrogeologists: NIEA Staff

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment how many Civil Service hydrogeologists have worked for the Environment Agency in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 8836/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** In the last 3 years, 2009 -2011, NIEA has employed 1 member of staff with a formal hydrogeological qualification.



In addition to permanent staff employed by NIEA, the Agency is supported by hydrogeologists contracted from the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland and also from an environmental consultancy group.

Hydrogeologists from GSNI are Public Servants under contract from the British Geological Survey.

### **Councils: Power to Rename Streets**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment when he will bring forward proposals to give councils an explicit power to rename streets.

**(AQW 8867/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I am aiming to issue for consultation proposals on street names, which will include the issue of providing councils with explicit powers to rename streets, during the course of 2012.

### **Colletes Floralis Mining Bee: Bushfoot Strand, County Antrim**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether his Department has any evidence of the existence of the colletes floralis mining bee in the vicinity of Bushfoot Strand, Co Antrim; and (ii) whether the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation was consulted on the proposal for the Dunes Golf Course development; and to provide details of its response.

**(AQW 8920/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:**

- (i) The Northern colletes, *Colletes floralis*, was recorded at three locations in 2008, one of which was within the development boundary. Further survey in 2011 did not record the bee as being present.
- (ii) Decisions about nomination, management and the status of World Heritage properties are taken by the World Heritage Committee (WHC) which meets annually. This means that consultation with the WHC would result in lengthy delays in reaching a local decision. I therefore did not consult the WHC on the proposal for the Bushmills Dunes development.

The Department did however advise the Department for Culture, Media, Sport and Leisure (DCMS), which is the Government body responsible for all World Heritage properties in the UK, immediately once my decision was taken. DCMS in turn advised UNESCO which is the parent body of the WHC.

The Department has also committed to send a State of Conservation report to UNESCO within four weeks to provide more detail about the proposal and the decision. It will also provide an updated and full account of the planning policies, progress of the development plan and any other relevant provisions for protecting the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage property. The WHC is likely to consider this report at its next meeting in June after which a response can be expected. The WHC may request an independent review which could then be considered at its 2013 meeting.

The importance of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site (WHS) and its setting is recognised and provided for in both regional planning policy and the emerging development plan for the area. Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage policy BH5: The Protection of World Heritage Sites states that "The Department will operate a presumption in favour of the preservation of World Heritage Sites and that development which would adversely affect such sites or the integrity of their settings will not be permitted unless there are exceptional circumstances."

The emerging Northern Area Plan contains designations and policies relating to the WHS which recognise and seek to protect its landscape setting. These are currently being considered through the Independent Examination which the Planning Appeals Commission is conducting. The Department has proposed these policies to support one of the objectives in the WHS Management Plan 2005 which was prepared to meet the UK government obligation under the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention. The objective is "to encourage the protection of the setting of the site and to secure the overall integrity of the site".

The importance of protecting the WHS and its setting in the planning process is therefore fully recognised. Legislation however allows development plan policies and designations to be outweighed by other material considerations and PPS6 policy BH5 allows for development which would adversely affect the WHS if there are exceptional circumstances. This is a matter of planning judgement and in the Department's view, which I fully endorsed, there were exceptional circumstances in this case that outweighed the environmental impact that will result from the development. As a result of discussions between officials and the applicant the plans have been amended to reduce the development's prominence and I have ensured that there are stringent environmental conditions included in the final notice of opinion to ensure that the environmental impact will be mitigated as much as possible.

### **Environment Agency: Independent Board Members**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether there has been a reduction in the number of independent members on (a) the Board of the Environment Agency; and (b) other Boards within his Department, or its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last 12 months; and (ii) to outline the reasons for the reductions.

**(AQW 8921/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I have considered the number of independent board members (IBMs) on the Departmental Board and each Agency Board within the Department and concluded that one IBM per Board (a total number of 3 IBM's in the Department) is sufficient to

fulfil an audit and challenge function. The IBM on each Board will chair the relevant Audit Committee in line with the standards of good corporate governance.

As a consequence, there has been a reduction in the number of IBMs in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), where 2 contracts expired in August 2011, and following a re-appointment process, 1 member was re-appointed to the NIEA Board in November 2011. The IBM also chairs the Audit Committee and is supported by 2 officials who are independent of the Agency, contributing to a challenge and audit function.

In addition, with the de-agentisation of the Planning Service, from 1 April 2011, and the winding up of the Planning Service Agency Board and Audit Committee there was no longer a requirement for an IBM. The IBM in Planning Service chaired his last Audit Committee in June 2011 as part of the process of finalising the 2010-11 Agency Accounts.

I plan to continue to reduce the number of IBMs in the Department as existing contracts expire. I am confident that the Audit Committees will continue to perform their functions effectively with IBM membership and senior officials from outside the Department or agency.

### **Tamboran Resources Ltd: Ministerial Meeting**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on his recent meeting with Tamboran.  
(AQW 8923/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** Given the widespread concerns in relation to the process of hydraulic fracturing I asked to meet representatives of Tamboran Resources to hear directly from the company. The company confirmed that they were still in the exploration phase of the proposal and outlined their thinking.

I made it explicitly clear of the imperative that the company ensures it complies with all appropriate environmental requirements. I commented that there will be the need for a robust and thorough Environmental Impact Assessment which deals all the relevant issues. Tamboran accepted the need for such an assessment and to liaise with both Strategic Planning Division and NIEA in scoping the content of the Environmental Statement.

I advised the company that the company should keep the Government and the community properly informed of their activities and that their recent media briefings had not built confidence, including with me as the Minister with responsibility for planning and environmental regulations.

I believe the company fully know where I and DOE stand on this issue. I continue to actively assess how to manage this issue.

### **Listed Buildings: Banbridge/Lurgan/Portadown**

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the listed buildings in (i) Banbridge; (ii) Lurgan; and (iii) Portadown.  
(AQW 8945/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** The Northern Ireland Environment Agency records listed buildings on a ward basis within District Council areas (1974 boundaries apply).

There are currently 334 listed buildings in the Banbridge District Council area; There are 208 listed buildings in the Craigavon District Council area which covers the Lurgan and Portadown areas. Of these there are 166 listed buildings in the Banbridge town area, 130 in Lurgan and 63 in Portadown.

It should be noted that some of these entries may relate to multiple properties - such as terraces or large estates - which may feature on the list as a single record.

More detailed information on individual buildings/addresses may be found on the Northern Ireland Buildings Record which is published on NIEA's website.

You can access this information via the following link:

<http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/other-index/content-databases/content-databases-build.htm>

### **Car Parks: Operating Illegally**

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of the Environment how many illegal car parks are currently operating in each council area.  
(AQW 8946/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** Since becoming Minister I have made it clear that enforcement must be given high priority across my Department and have implemented a number of measures aimed at providing a more robust approach to unauthorised development.

There were 32 enforcement cases relating to alleged unauthorised car parks as of 9 March 2012 and these are set out by Council area in the table below.

| <b>Council Area</b> | <b>Number of enforcement cases</b> |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| Antrim              | 8                                  |
| Ards                | 1                                  |

| <b>Council Area</b> | <b>Number of enforcement cases</b> |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| Armagh              | 0                                  |
| Ballymena           | 0                                  |
| Ballymoney          | 0                                  |
| Banbridge           | 1                                  |
| Belfast             | 17                                 |
| Carrickfergus       | 0                                  |
| Castlereagh         | 0                                  |
| Coleraine           | 0                                  |
| Cookstown           | 0                                  |
| Craigavon           | 0                                  |
| Derry               | 0                                  |
| Down                | 2                                  |
| Dungannon           | 0                                  |
| Fermanagh           | 0                                  |
| Larne               | 0                                  |
| Limavady            | 1                                  |
| Lisburn             | 0                                  |
| Magherafelt         | 0                                  |
| Moyle               | 0                                  |
| Newry and Mourne    | 1                                  |
| Newtownabbey        | 0                                  |
| North Down          | 1                                  |
| Omagh               | 0                                  |
| Strabane            | 0                                  |

### **ASDA: New Store at Crescent Link Retail Park**

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he is aware of the opinion poll, involving 1017 residents in Londonderry and its surrounding areas, which was conducted between 4-11 January 2012 and showed that (i) 81 percent supported ASDA's plans for a new store at Crescent Link Retail Park; (ii) 79 percent agreed that a greater choice of supermarkets would result in lower prices; and (iii) 81 percent would welcome a greater choice of supermarket provision.

**(AQW 8947/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I am aware of the opinion poll carried out by LucidTalk Ltd in January this year on ASDA's behalf.

The findings of this poll will be considered as part of my Department's assessment of the current Article 31 planning application for a new ASDA store at Crescent Link Retail Park, Derry.

### **Planning Applications: Class 1 Food Superstores in Londonderry**

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) all the Class 1 food superstores in Londonderry which service the city and its surrounding areas; and (ii) whether he will give consideration to promoting consumer choice when making a decision on the current planning applications for Class 1 food superstores in Londonderry.

**(AQW 8948/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:**

(i) A list of the food superstores and their location in Derry/Londonderry is attached below.

Each of the current applications for food superstores in Derry/Londonderry will be considered on their individual merits. Planning Policy Statement 5:

- (ii) Retailing and Town centres sets out my Department's policy objectives for town centres and retail developments which seek, among other things, to focus development, especially retail development, in locations where the proximity of businesses facilitates competition from which all consumers are able to benefit.

PPS5 also highlights that the Department's commitment to allow freedom of choice and flexibility in retail development, throughout the North, to assist in the provision of a wide range of shopping opportunities which are accessible by the whole community.

Consumer choice is relevant to all major retail proposals and it will be a key material consideration in the Department's assessment of the subject applications in Derry/Londonderry, details of which are:

| Store/Centre Name | Location                              |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Tesco             | Quayside Shopping Centre, City Centre |
| Sainsburys        | Strand Road                           |
| Tesco             | Lisnagelvin District Centre           |
| Dunnes Stores     | Springtown District Centre            |

Please note this is not an exhaustive list and the Department is considering a range of convenience operators within Derry/Londonderry in addition to the superstores. Other convenience operators include the Supervalu at Northside District Centre, the Costcutter at Rathmore District Centre, the Supervalu at Waterloo Place, Longs at Lisnagelvin District Centre and Lidl Buncrana Road.

A superstore is defined in PPS5 as a self-service store selling mainly food, or food and non-food goods, usually with more than 2500sqm gross retail floorspace. The list of food superstores above are based on this definition.

### **ASDA: New Store at Crescent Link Retail Park**

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of the Environment when he will make a decision on planning application A/2010/0493/F in relation to an ASDA store at Crescent Link Retail Park, Londonderry.

**(AQW 8951/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** This planning application is being assessed along with several other current applications in Derry which include a major retail element as part of the proposals.

My officials have undertaken a thorough reassessment of the relevant retail information associated with these proposals to ensure that decisions are made with the benefit of the most up to date information available.

Each case will be considered on its individual merits.

### **Motorcycles: Compulsory Basic Training Test**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment, to detail (i) why the law was changed to require that experienced L plate drivers of motorcycles under 125cc undertake a compulsory basic training (CBT) test; (ii) whether, once a driver has completed a CBT test they will be required to repeat the test every two years; and to outline the rationale for this; (iii) for his assessment of the number of motorcycle and scooter drivers who, as a result of the additional £170 expense of undertaking a CBT test, may decide to drive a car instead; and the potential impact this will have on traffic congestion and the environment; (iv) for his assessment of the extent to which the introduction of the CBT test will reduce the average number of accidents, per driver; (v) whether the benefits of introducing a mandatory CBT test for all L plate drivers outweigh the £170 cost; and (vi) whether there is a more flexible arrangement for drivers who can demonstrate considerable experience.

**(AQW 8990/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Prior to the introduction of compulsory basic training (CBT) in Northern Ireland, anyone wishing to learn to ride a motorcycle only needed to apply for a provisional licence. The licence was valid for 10 years and could be renewed upon application. Once this had been received the person could ride a motorcycle not exceeding 125cc/11kW on the road as long as they displayed 'L' plates and complied with insurance and other legal requirements. There was no requirement to take any mandatory training, nor was there any incentive for them to take a test or obtain a full driving licence. Learner riders could ride motorcycles indefinitely without ever being trained and/or tested - they were effectively in a permanent state of learning. In addition, research into motorcycle related collisions showed that 21% of motorcyclists involved in KSI collisions (ie where someone was killed or seriously injured) were 'L' drivers (33% of all collisions).

In the circumstances, it was considered that action needed to be taken to improve the standard of training and testing, and that CBT had a significant role to play. The evidence suggested that licence holders who had obtained provisional entitlement prior to the introduction of CBT were also at risk, so it was decided that the requirement for CBT to be undertaken should apply to them as well as to new provisional licence holders.

CBT, the cost of which is determined by the market rather than by the Department, is a course, not a test. Once it has been completed successfully, the participant is issued with a certificate valid for two years. During this time the rider may choose to

gain full entitlement to ride a motorcycle by taking a motorcycle test. Once full entitlement is gained, there is no need to retake CBT. However, failure to attain full entitlement within this two-year period results in the rider having to re-take CBT, in order to demonstrate that they have retained the knowledge and skills necessary to enable them to ride safely.

It is not possible to estimate how many motorcycle provisional licence holders actually ride motorcycles as all full car licences provide provisional motorcycle entitlement. Prior to the introduction of CBT, however, and in order to predict the number of motorcyclists who might require CBT training, the NI vehicle licensing database was used to identify the registered keepers of all motorcycles with cylinder capacities less than or equal to 125cc. Motorcycles with larger cylinder capacities cannot be ridden legally by provisional licence holders. This identified 10,087 motorcycles registered to 8,038 keepers.

All of those identified were written to in order to inform them of the requirement either to gain full motorcycle entitlement within 12 months from 21 February 2011 or to undertake a CBT course. During this 12-month period there was an increase of 45% in applications for motorcycle tests. Those riders who chose to gain full entitlement at that time will not have had the additional expense of a CBT course.

It is also worth noting that during this period there was a drop in the number of car tests and whilst there is no evidence to suggest this was a direct result of the introduction of CBT it may have been a factor.

Britain introduced CBT in 1990 and there is nothing to suggest that there was an increase in traffic congestion or that it had a detrimental impact on the environment. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the same results will be experienced in Northern Ireland.

The CBT scheme was introduced in Britain in 1990 and evidence shows since introduction there has been an improvement in road safety for both motorcyclists and other road users. Deaths for motorcycle riders through road collisions decreased from 469 in 1992 to 440 in 1996. It is envisaged that Northern Ireland will experience similar benefits. Also as part of the course syllabus focuses on the environment and eco-safe riding it is envisaged that environmental awareness will increase as a result of CBT. The potential road safety and environmental benefits clearly outweigh the cost of the course.

The CBT scheme, which was developed in conjunction with the motorcycle industry, road safety organisations and the PSNI, was designed with flexibility in mind not only to take account of a trainee's experience and knowledge but also to accommodate an individual's ability to learn. The course may be delivered and undertaken in either bite-sized pieces or as a full course, which means trainees may learn at their own pace thereby spreading the overall costs.

CBT, once completed, is valid for two years and provided full motorcycle entitlement is gained within this period will not be required again. However, if a person decides not to take a motorcycle test and remain a learner rider, they have to complete CBT every two years but when undertaking subsequent courses, positive experiences will be taken into consideration and this will reduce the amount of time required to deliver the course which, in turn, should reduce the overall cost of the course.

### **Councillors: Review of Public Administration**

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of the Environment to provide an estimate of the total annual cost of councillors based on (i) the number of MLA/Councillors remaining the same, and the two thirds reduction in salary being introduced; and (ii) the position following the abolition of dual mandates and all Councillors being entitled to full salary.

**(AQW 9023/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Using the information from the financial statements of councils for the year ending March 2011, the total annual cost of the 582 councillors in Northern Ireland during the period 2010/2011 was £7,906,984.

There are currently 29 councillors who hold dual/multiple mandates. The total estimated annual cost, allowing for a two-thirds reduction in the basic allowance and special responsibility allowance payable to dual/multiple mandate councillors, during the same period would be £7,713,532 (a difference of £193,452).

Following the abolition of dual mandates and allowing for no revision in the amount of the allowances payable, the total estimated annual cost of the 582 councillors would be unchanged from the current cost of £7,906,984.

### **HGV Licence: Medical Assessments**

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he has taken to reduce the delay in issuing HGV licences that are dependent on medical assessments.

**(AQW 9043/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Applicants for driving licences with entitlement to drive large goods vehicles (LGV) or passenger-carrying vehicles (PCV) are required to meet higher medical standards than drivers of other vehicles. All LGV and PCV driving licence applications requiring medical assessments are referred to the Occupational Health Service (OHS), who make recommendations on an applicant's fitness to drive, based on the medical evidence provided. In some cases, OHS request additional information or a medical examination before a recommendation can be made.

All LGV and PCV applications are referred to OHS within 10 working days of receipt and licences are issued within 10 working days of receipt of OHS recommendations. In order to minimise delays in the application process, my Department has entered into a service level agreement with OHS which requires 75% of cases not requiring further medical evidence to be returned within 12 working days and 90% within 20 working days. In practice, cases are generally dealt with well within these target times.

There can be individual cases where further medical evidence is required either from OHS-appointed experts or from an applicant's own doctor, and there can be some delay in these cases. However, such cases are monitored closely and every effort is made to expedite decisions.

If there are issues around this process, I welcome hearing from members.

### Areas of Special Scientific Interest: Locations

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the locations of all Areas of Special Scientific Interest that have been declared in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 9044/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Department has declared 25 Areas of Special Scientific Interest in each of the last three financial years.

Details of the locations are attached.

| SiteNo  | SiteName                      | County              | ConfirmArea | DeclareDate |
|---------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|
| ASSI296 | River Faughan and Tributaries | Londonderry, Tyrone | 202.00      | 09/05/2008  |
| ASSI299 | Ross                          | Fermanagh           | 17.57       | 19/12/2008  |
| ASSI297 | Knocknashangan                | Fermanagh           | 5.75        | 12/01/2009  |
| ASSI286 | Castle Point                  | Antrim              | 8.54        | 15/01/2009  |
| ASSI293 | Cloghinny                     | Armagh              | 4.26        | 15/01/2009  |
| ASSI289 | Camlough Quarry               | Armagh              | 0.38        | 22/01/2009  |
| ASSI306 | Lower Creevagh                | Londonderry         | 0.21        | 22/01/2009  |
| ASSI290 | Lislea                        | Armagh              | 5.22        | 22/01/2009  |
| ASSI300 | Scraghy                       | Tyrone              | 13.05       | 02/02/2009  |
| ASSI301 | Cloghfin Port                 | Antrim              | 3.70        | 10/02/2009  |
| ASSI292 | Glendesha                     | Armagh              | 0.97        | 20/02/2009  |
| ASSI291 | Mullaghbane                   | Armagh              | 5.49        | 27/02/2009  |
| ASSI307 | Knocknacloy                   | Tyrone              | 2.42        | 27/02/2009  |
| ASSI245 | Shimna River                  | Down                | 38.78       | 09/03/2009  |
| ASSI298 | Blackslee                     | Fermanagh           | 31.45       | 09/03/2009  |
| ASSI303 | Slieveanorra and Croaghan     | Antrim              | 1,609.77    | 11/03/2009  |
| ASSI295 | Lough Gullion                 | Armagh              | 126.28      | 23/03/2009  |
| ASSI311 | Mountfield Quarry             | Tyrone              | 1.08        | 25/03/2009  |
| ASSI305 | Moneystaghan Bog              | Londonderry         | 163.96      | 25/03/2009  |
| ASSI254 | Glenballyemon River           | Antrim              | 27.14       | 25/03/2009  |
| ASSI308 | Annaghagh Bog                 | Tyrone              | 64.47       | 31/03/2009  |
| ASSI309 | Mullaghcarn                   | Tyrone              | 2,039.49    | 31/03/2009  |
| ASSI287 | Glarryford                    | Antrim              | 259.44      | 31/03/2009  |
| ASSI302 | Carey Valley                  | Antrim              | 495.79      | 31/03/2009  |
| ASSI304 | Aghabrack                     | Tyrone              | 122.74      | 31/03/2009  |
| ASSI322 | Drumbegger                    | Fermanagh           | 3.38        | 17/08/2009  |
| ASSI288 | Lisnaragh                     | Tyrone              | 139.96      | 04/09/2009  |
| ASSI324 | Keadew                        | Fermanagh           | 6.53        | 14/09/2009  |
| ASSI315 | Coolcran                      | Fermanagh           | 0.38        | 14/09/2009  |

| SiteNo  | SiteName                   | County         | ConfirmArea | DeclareDate |
|---------|----------------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| ASSI321 | Tullyratty                 | Down           | 13.53       | 21/09/2009  |
| ASSI317 | Makenny                    | Tyrone         | 0.14        | 21/09/2009  |
| ASSI320 | The Maidens                | Antrim         | 6.06        | 21/09/2009  |
| ASSI319 | Gravel Ridge Island        | Fermanagh      | 1.15        | 30/09/2009  |
| ASSI312 | Sruhanleanantawey Burn     | Londonderry    | 1.75        | 16/11/2009  |
| ASSI314 | Largy Quarry               | Fermanagh      | 0.72        | 16/11/2009  |
| ASSI323 | Little Deer Park           | Antrim         | 19.30       | 27/11/2009  |
| ASSI332 | Tower More                 | Fermanagh      | 119.83      | 07/01/2010  |
| ASSI313 | Cashel Rock                | Tyrone         | 19.07       | 01/02/2010  |
| ASSI331 | Glen East                  | Fermanagh      | 14.65       | 22/02/2010  |
| ASSI327 | Church Bay                 | Antrim         | 20.44       | 26/02/2010  |
| ASSI339 | Brackagh Bog               | Armagh         | 113.25      | 05/03/2010  |
| ASSI334 | Brookend                   | Tyrone         | 1.49        | 11/03/2010  |
| ASSI341 | Linford                    | Antrim         | 14.39       | 15/03/2010  |
| ASSI342 | Caledon and Tynan          | Armagh, Tyrone | 318.27      | 18/03/2010  |
| ASSI337 | Minnis                     | Antrim         | 9.38        | 23/03/2010  |
| ASSI338 | Cloghastucan               | Antrim         | 2.95        | 24/03/2010  |
| ASSI336 | Blaeberry Island Bog       | Down           | 24.58       | 26/03/2010  |
| ASSI343 | North Woodburn Reservoir   | Antrim         | 9.11        | 30/03/2010  |
| ASSI345 | Copeland Reservoir         | Antrim         | 10.32       | 30/03/2010  |
| ASSI344 | South Woodburn             | Antrim         | 77.51       | 30/03/2010  |
| ASSI330 | Fair Head and Murlough Bay | Antrim         | 251.26      | 17/08/2010  |
| ASSI329 | Ederney Quarry             | Fermanagh      | 1.77        | 24/09/2010  |
| ASSI326 | Larkhill                   | Fermanagh      | 1.38        | 24/09/2010  |
| ASSI328 | Drumbally Hill             | Londonderry    | 0.12        | 24/09/2010  |
| ASSI347 | Loughermore Mountain       | Londonderry    | 1.18        | 30/09/2010  |
| ASSI333 | Galboly                    | Antrim         | 192.78      | 14/10/2010  |
| ASSI353 | Lough Anierin              | Fermanagh      | 18.39       | 04/11/2010  |
| ASSI356 | Rathlin Island - Kebble    | Antrim         | 138.72      | 25/01/2011  |
| ASSI325 | Butterlope Glen            | Tyrone         | 6.90        | 08/02/2011  |
| ASSI359 | Lough Naman Bog and Lake   | Fermanagh      | 48.30       | 09/02/2011  |
| ASSI349 | Baronscourt                | Tyrone         | 103.78      | 09/02/2011  |
| ASSI361 | Clarehill                  | Down           | 1.26        | 18/02/2011  |
| ASSI348 | Lough Macrory              | Tyrone         | 29.02       | 23/02/2011  |
| ASSI369 | Glenarm Woods Part 2       | Antrim         | 22.57       | 23/02/2011  |
| ASSI371 | Gortcorbies                | Londonderry    | 55.21       | 04/03/2011  |

| SiteNo       | SiteName                       | County    | ConfirmArea     | DeclareDate |
|--------------|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------|
| ASSI364      | Tempo River                    | Fermanagh | 28.06           | 16/03/2011  |
| ASSI372      | Craigs                         | Antrim    | 13.46           | 16/03/2011  |
| ASSI355      | Glenariff Glen                 | Antrim    | 12.71           | 16/03/2011  |
| ASSI350      | Castle Coole                   | Fermanagh | 163.83          | 23/03/2011  |
| ASSI354      | Lough Cowey                    | Down      | 30.11           | 23/03/2011  |
| ASSI373      | Drummond Quarry                | Tyrone    | 0.44            | 29/03/2011  |
| ASSI367      | Kilbroney River                | Down      | 0.38            | 29/03/2011  |
| ASSI357      | Killeter Forest Bogs and Lakes | Tyrone    | 299.64          | 31/03/2011  |
| ASSI358      | Tyrella and Minerstown         | Down      | 272.08          | 31/03/2011  |
| ASSI368      | Gruggandoo                     | Down      | 5.26            | 31/03/2011  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>75.00</b>                   |           | <b>7,896.70</b> |             |

### Waste Incinerator: Greater Belfast

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the annual tonnage capacity that the proposed ARC 21 waste incinerator for Greater Belfast will need to meet EU waste management targets; (ii) whether there will be a requirement to produce a minimum amount of waste to ensure that the incinerator is economically viable, and whether this might impact on efforts to reduce waste and increase the level of recycling; (iii) whether the business case accurately predicts the annual tonnage of municipal waste likely to require incineration; and (iv) whether, in the event of the incinerator proceeding, there will be a public consultation exercise to seek views on a final list of preferred sites.

**(AQW 9063/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Outline Business Case for the arc21 project used a reference project that was based on 430k tonnes-per-annum capacity for Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) and 200k tonnes-per-annum Energy from Waste (EfW) capacity. The project was advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union on the basis of maximising landfill diversion.

The overall tonnage of waste arisings in the arc21 catchment area has fallen since the procurement was advertised; the capacities of the proposed facilities have been reduced accordingly.

The size of the proposed MBT and EfW facilities will only be confirmed when the remaining bidder and arc21 reach the Contract Award stage

arc21 is expected to commit a Guaranteed Minimum Tonnage (GMT) to the procurement. The GMT is the amount that individual Councils will have to agree to commit to the Project annually over the course of the lifetime of the contract. The GMT level will be confirmed should the remaining bidder and arc21 reach the Contract Award stage. The Department is not aware of the GMT figure as this Project is still in commercially sensitive Competitive Dialogue.

The tonnage figures for this project has been closely tracked throughout the procurement process and as tonnage has fallen, due to factors such as economic decline and increased recycling, so too has the amount that the project (and its constituent councils) will commit to the project. The capacity of the proposed EfW plant is therefore considered the correct size for the needs of the project.

Some additional capacity for Commercial & Industrial (C&I) waste streams has been built into the project.

In terms of waste reduction, the key driver is more likely to be how quickly Northern Ireland comes out of the recent recession. The current trend in waste reduction is influenced by our economic fortunes and not necessarily a conscious effort by many householders to reduce waste because it is a good thing to do. Councils will hold back sufficient tonnage to meet their statutory recycling targets.

The arc21 project will contribute to the achievement of higher recycling figures through its front-end MBT (Mechanical Biological Treatment) process.

The arc21 Outline Business Case is based on minimising the amount of waste sent to landfill in accordance with statutory targets. As the overall tonnage of waste arisings in the arc21 catchment area has fallen during the period of procurement, so too has the capacity of the EfW plant. This is one of the checks that are in place to guard against over-provision and to ensure that the EfW plant has the appropriate capacity to handle the solid recovered fuel produced by the MBT process. There will also be some spare capacity for C&I waste.

The Outline Business Case will be updated, including a review of the capacity requirements, by an Appointment Business Case and Final Business Case before the contract can be awarded.



The preferred site is an output from the robust site selection process carried out as part of the legally compliant competitive tendering exercise and in accordance with strict site selection criteria. This is clearly the case that this is of particular public and political interest.

Public consultation is initiated at the point where a bidder decides to make a planning application. This involves advertisement of the planning application, consultation with the local council and advertisement of the Environmental Statement which is the main vehicle for full public engagement in the processing of major applications. This is in line with the relevant EU Directive and local planning regulations.

The individual bidder may initiate additional local and community involvement in the process in line with their own custom and practice.

In relation to the procurement exercise generally, I continue to ensure the Department fully exercises its statutory function and appropriate government oversight.

### **Taxis: Operator Licences**

**Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of the Environment when he proposes to introduce Taxi Operator Licences.  
(AQO 1422/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** I plan to make final announcements on the introduction shortly.

In coming to the decisions that I will announce, I spoke with many taxi operators and key stakeholders. There will be flexibility in the licensing period particularly for small operators and allow the industry to benefit from the better regulation that operator licensing brings.

### **Planning Control: Breaches**

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he is considering changing the present law which states that it is not illegal to build without planning permission.  
(AQW 9088/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** Currently any individual who undertakes development without planning permission has not committed a criminal offence but has breached planning control and may be subject to enforcement action. The planning enforcement system seeks to remedy breaches of planning control where possible, however, if an individual fails to remedy the situation the Department may take a prosecution through the Courts.

The onus in such cases is on the 'offender' to prove, on the balance of probability, that there was either no breach or that what has been done is lawful. The introduction of criminalisation would shift the burden of proof to the Department with a criminal requirement of 'beyond reasonable doubt'. As the margins between lawful and unlawful development are not always clear cut this could prove to be extremely challenging and undermine, rather than enhance, enforcement activity.

In addition to the consideration of the legal and resource implications of implementation, such a system could have a significant negative impact upon individuals who inadvertently breach planning control and yet could end up with a criminal record.

Enforcement powers have been significantly strengthened over recent years. The most recent changes were introduced under the Planning Act (NI) 2011 which, upon Royal Assent in May 2011, increased maximum fines for breaches of planning control relating to listed buildings and tree preservation orders from £30,000 to £100,000. In December 2011 I also introduced a standardised 5 year time limit for taking enforcement action against breaches of planning control which will allow for greater clarity and a more efficient system of control. Indeed this change was supported by a comprehensive review of pending enforcement cases which resulted in approximately 116 Enforcement Notices being served in the three months preceding the time limit change.

I intend that a Planning Bill currently being drafted will introduce further enforcement powers including further higher maximum fines, higher fees for retrospective planning applications and fixed penalty notices.

I believe that effective enforcement must be seen as a deterrent to individuals who flout planning legislation and I have sent out a strong message to my staff that robust enforcement is an essential element of a balanced planning system. Given the drawbacks associated with criminalisation combined with the recent and planned enhancement to the Department's enforcement powers, I currently do not intend to pursue universal criminalisation of development without planning permission.

### **Disciplinary Action: DOE Staff**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of staff disciplinary actions taken by his Department in each of the last two years, at Staff Officer level and above, including details of the offence and the disciplinary sanctions applied.  
(AQW 9118/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** The table below provides the number of staff disciplinary actions taken that led to a formal penalty being imposed under the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) disciplinary procedures. Details are provided for cases where the penalty was imposed within the 2010 and 2011 calendar years. The information relates to staff at the Staff Officer grade and above including analogous grades.

| Department | Year | Number of Staff at Staff Officer Grade and Above | Disciplinary Type                  | Disciplinary Sanctions/Penalties   |
|------------|------|--|------------------------------------|--|
| DOE        | 2010 | 5  | 5 Misconduct                       | 3 Written reprimands.<br>1 Written reprimand plus a fine.<br>1 Written reprimand plus compulsory transfer. |
| DOE        | 2011 | 4  | 3 Misconduct<br>1 Gross Misconduct | 3 Written reprimands.<br>1 Written reprimand plus compulsory transfer and a one year promotion ban.        |

### Planning Applications: North Down

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail number of planning applications (i) approved; and (ii) refused in the North Down Borough Council area in (a) 2008/09; (b) 2009/10; and (c) 2010/11.

**(AQW 9154/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Table 1: Planning decisions for North Down Borough Council

|         | Approved | Refused | Total |
|---------|----------|---------|-------|
| 2008/09 | 875      | 55      | 930   |
| 2009/10 | 646      | 38      | 684   |
| 2010/11 | 539      | 34      | 573   |

**Source:** Planning

**Note:** This information is available in the Annual Statistical Bulletin and can be accessed on the Planning website.

### Modiolus Mussels: Strangford Lough

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of the Environment whether minutes were taken during the recent meeting between departmental officials and the European Commission in relation to the modiolus mussels in Strangford Lough, and whether he will publish any notes, minutes and decisions that were taken at the meeting.

**(AQW 9398/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I recently gave a full account to the Environment Committee, of my assessment of the position of DOE and DARD in relation to Strangford Lough following the Package Meeting held by the European Commission in January. At this briefing I indicated that the Commission was expected to renew its infringement action against the two Departments shortly. Officials advised the committee on 15 March 2012 that a letter has now been received from the Commission, confirming that the infringement process is now commencing.

The Commission has produced a note of this meeting but has not given the Department its permission to release it.

On receipt of formal correspondence from the Commission commencing infringement action I will inform the Committee immediately.

## Department of Finance and Personnel

### Civil Service: Jobs

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of Civil Service jobs, in each Department, that are located in each (i) constituency; and (ii) council area.

**(AQW 6853/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):** The most recent published information on the number of Civil Service jobs in each of the Northern Ireland Civil Service departments, that are located in each (i) constituency; and (ii) council area are set out in the table below. For the purposes of this AQ, Civil Service jobs has been defined as Northern Ireland Civil Service staff in post (headcount).

**NICS Staff (Headcount) at 1 April 2011 by Parliamentary Constituency**

|                          | DARD        | DCAL       | DE         | DEL         | DETI       | DFP         | DHSSPS     | DOE         | DOJ         | DRD         | DSD         | OFMDFM     | PPS        | OTHER*     | TOTAL        |
|--------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Belfast East             | 841         | 76         | 0          | 45          | 290        | 890         | 607        | 0           | 406         | 85          | 278         | 289        | 0          | 92         | 3899         |
| Belfast North            | 60          | 1          | 0          | 78          | 0          | 46          | 0          | 151         | 115         | 33          | 740         | 0          | 1          | 3          | 1228         |
| Belfast South            | 73          | 160        | 2          | 856         | 144        | 1819        | 5          | 1003        | 755         | 713         | 3431        | 26         | 282        | 38         | 9307         |
| Belfast West             | 0           | 0          | 0          | 88          | 0          | 0           | 0          | 2           | 5           | 5           | 916         | 0          | 0          | 22         | 1038         |
| East Antrim              | 43          | 0          | 0          | 66          | 0          | 4           | 0          | 26          | 209         | 7           | 59          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 414          |
| East London-derry        | 196         | 0          | 0          | 84          | 0          | 0           | 0          | 467         | 14          | 155         | 102         | 0          | 0          | 1          | 1019         |
| Fermanagh & South Tyrone | 319         | 11         | 0          | 90          | 0          | 0           | 0          | 83          | 24          | 147         | 116         | 0          | 0          | 1          | 791          |
| Foyle                    | 198         | 0          | 98         | 133         | 4          | 173         | 2          | 76          | 56          | 71          | 749         | 3          | 43         | 0          | 1606         |
| Lagan Valley             | 116         | 0          | 0          | 59          | 0          | 38          | 0          | 265         | 14          | 56          | 50          | 0          | 89         | 0          | 687          |
| Mid Ulster               | 155         | 0          | 0          | 54          | 0          | 0           | 0          | 35          | 0           | 49          | 92          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 385          |
| Newry & Armagh           | 217         | 0          | 0          | 105         | 3          | 0           | 0          | 65          | 35          | 106         | 147         | 11         | 15         | 0          | 704          |
| North Antrim             | 118         | 23         | 0          | 88          | 5          | 63          | 0          | 103         | 25          | 187         | 76          | 0          | 60         | 0          | 748          |
| North Down               | 1           | 0          | 506        | 29          | 0          | 239         | 0          | 6           | 157         | 12          | 48          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 998          |
| South Antrim             | 225         | 0          | 0          | 44          | 0          | 0           | 0          | 32          | 15          | 106         | 55          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 477          |
| South Down               | 68          | 9          | 0          | 53          | 0          | 2           | 0          | 92          | 16          | 183         | 102         | 0          | 0          | 0          | 525          |
| Strangford               | 53          | 0          | 0          | 27          | 0          | 0           | 11         | 55          | 31          | 14          | 44          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 235          |
| Upper Bann               | 101         | 9          | 0          | 118         | 0          | 67          | 0          | 110         | 36          | 198         | 133         | 0          | 0          | 0          | 772          |
| West Tyrone              | 174         | 0          | 0          | 73          | 0          | 74          | 0          | 88          | 34          | 247         | 164         | 0          | 62         | 5          | 921          |
| Unknown **               | 5           | 1          | 3          | 0           | 1          | 14          | 5          | 10          | 489         | 31          | 35          | 7          | 1          | 3          | 605          |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>2963</b> | <b>290</b> | <b>609</b> | <b>2090</b> | <b>447</b> | <b>3429</b> | <b>630</b> | <b>2669</b> | <b>2436</b> | <b>2405</b> | <b>7337</b> | <b>336</b> | <b>553</b> | <b>165</b> | <b>26359</b> |

**Notes**

- Data sourced from HR Connect & Additional DOJ databases at 1st Apr 2011.
- Figures comprise Staff Headcount for staff working in the 13 Northern Ireland Departments and 'other', as defined below:
- \*"OTHER" comprises civil servants working in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, and staff of The Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland/The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints.
- \*\*"Unknown" are staff whose work location was not recorded at time the information was extracted by the NI Statistics and Research Agency.
- Includes all Permanent NICS staff for whom Work Location information is available with the exception of uniformed Prison Service staff.
- Staff on career break are excluded.

**NICS Staff (Headcount) at 1 April 2011 by Council Area (1)**

|  | DARD | DCAL | DE | DEL | DETI | DFP  | DHSSPS | DOE  | DOJ  | DRD | DSD  | OFMDFM | PPS | OTHER* | TOTAL |
|--|------|------|----|-----|------|------|--------|------|------|-----|------|--------|-----|--------|-------|
| Antrim Borough Council                   | 220  | 0    | 0  | 44  | 0    | 0    | 0      | 0    | 15   | 38  | 55   | 0      | 0   | 0      | 372   |
| Ards Borough Council                     | 53   | 0    | 0  | 27  | 0    | 0    | 0      | 55   | 31   | 14  | 44   | 0      | 0   | 0      | 224   |
| Armagh City & District Council           | 91   | 0    | 0  | 35  | 3    | 0    | 0      | 37   | 9    | 59  | 84   | 11     | 0   | 0      | 329   |
| Ballymena Borough Council                | 113  | 0    | 0  | 51  | 5    | 63   | 0      | 103  | 25   | 158 | 64   | 0      | 60  | 0      | 642   |
| Ballymoney Borough Council               | 5    | 12   | 0  | 37  | 0    | 0    | 0      | 0    | 0    | 29  | 12   | 0      | 0   | 0      | 95    |
| Banbridge District Council               | 0    | 0    | 0  | 33  | 0    | 0    | 0      | 0    | 10   | 30  | 43   | 0      | 0   | 0      | 116   |
| Belfast City Council                     | 901  | 237  | 0  | 989 | 383  | 2755 | 612    | 1153 | 1275 | 648 | 5274 | 315    | 283 | 155    | 14980 |
| Carrickfergus Borough Council            | 0    | 0    | 0  | 37  | 0    | 4    | 0      | 6    | 209  | 0   | 25   | 0      | 0   | 0      | 281   |
| Castlereagh Borough Council              | 73   | 0    | 2  | 36  | 51   | 0    | 11     | 3    | 0    | 188 | 46   | 0      | 0   | 0      | 410   |
| Coleraine Borough Council                | 188  | 0    | 0  | 45  | 0    | 0    | 0      | 455  | 14   | 136 | 88   | 0      | 0   | 1      | 927   |
| Cookstown District Council               | 57   | 0    | 0  | 16  | 0    | 0    | 0      | 35   | 0    | 12  | 15   | 0      | 0   | 0      | 135   |
| Craigavon Borough Council                | 101  | 9    | 0  | 85  | 0    | 67   | 0      | 110  | 26   | 187 | 90   | 0      | 0   | 0      | 675   |
| Derry City Council                       | 198  | 0    | 98 | 133 | 4    | 173  | 2      | 76   | 56   | 71  | 749  | 3      | 43  | 0      | 1606  |
| Down District Council                    | 65   | 9    | 0  | 40  | 0    | 2    | 0      | 92   | 16   | 164 | 86   | 0      | 0   | 0      | 474   |
| Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council | 84   | 0    | 0  | 44  | 0    | 0    | 0      | 11   | 20   | 53  | 63   | 0      | 0   | 0      | 275   |

|                             | DARD | DCAL | DE | DEL | DETI | DFP | DHSSPS | DOE | DOJ | DRD | DSD | OFMDFM | PPS | OTHER* | TOTAL |
|-----------------------------|------|------|----|-----|------|-----|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------|-----|--------|-------|
| Ferm-anagh District Council | 235  | 11   | 0  | 46  | 0    | 0   | 0      | 72  | 4   | 94  | 53  | 0      | 0   | 1      | 516   |
| Larne Borough Council       | 43   | 0    | 0  | 29  | 0    | 0   | 0      | 20  | 0   | 7   | 34  | 0      | 0   | 0      | 133   |

**NICS Staff (Headcount) at 1 April 2011 by Council Area (2)**

|                                 | DARD        | DCAL       | DE         | DEL         | DETI       | DFP         | DHSSPS     | DOE         | DOJ         | DRD         | DSD         | OFMDFM     | PPS        | OTHER*     | TOTAL        |
|---------------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Limavady Borough Council        | 8           | 0          | 0          | 39          | 0          | 0           | 0          | 12          | 0           | 19          | 14          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 92           |
| Lisburn City Council            | 116         | 0          | 0          | 59          | 0          | 38          | 0          | 265         | 14          | 56          | 50          | 0          | 89         | 0          | 687          |
| Magherafelt District Council    | 98          | 0          | 0          | 38          | 0          | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0           | 37          | 77          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 250          |
| Moyle District Council          | 0           | 11         | 0          | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0          | 0          | 0          | 11           |
| Newry & Mourne District Council | 129         | 0          | 0          | 83          | 0          | 0           | 0          | 28          | 26          | 47          | 79          | 0          | 15         | 0          | 407          |
| Newtownabbey Borough Council    | 5           | 0          | 0          | 42          | 0          | 0           | 0          | 32          | 6           | 68          | 45          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 198          |
| North Down Borough Council      | 1           | 0          | 506        | 29          | 0          | 239         | 0          | 6           | 157         | 12          | 48          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 998          |
| Omagh District Council          | 173         | 0          | 0          | 46          | 0          | 74          | 0          | 88          | 34          | 206         | 121         | 0          | 62         | 5          | 809          |
| Strabane District Council       | 1           | 0          | 0          | 27          | 0          | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0           | 41          | 43          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 112          |
| Unknown-**                      | 5           | 1          | 3          | 0           | 1          | 14          | 5          | 10          | 489         | 31          | 35          | 7          | 1          | 3          | 605          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                    | <b>2963</b> | <b>290</b> | <b>609</b> | <b>2090</b> | <b>447</b> | <b>3429</b> | <b>630</b> | <b>2669</b> | <b>2436</b> | <b>2405</b> | <b>7337</b> | <b>336</b> | <b>553</b> | <b>165</b> | <b>26359</b> |

**Notes**

- Data sourced from HR Connect & Additional DOJ databases at 1st Apr 2011.
- Figures comprise Staff Headcount for staff working in the 13 Northern Ireland Departments and 'other', as defined below:
- \*"OTHER" comprises civil servants working in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, and staff of The Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland/The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints.

- \*\*"Unknown" are staff whose work location was not recorded at time the information was extracted by the NI Statistics and Research Agency .
- Includes all Permanent NICS staff for whom Work Location information is available with the exception of uniformed Prison Service staff.
- Staff on career break are excluded.

### Art Inventory

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to provide an inventory of the works of art currently held by each Department; and (ii) to detail the location of each work of art.

**(AQW 7554/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The information requested has been placed in the library.

### Government-owned Land and Assets: Upper Bann

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail all sales of Government-owned land and assets in the Upper Bann constituency in each of the last three years, including the land valuations provided by Land and Property Services and the amounts realised.

**(AQW 8181/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** There have been 151 sales of Government owned land and property assets in Upper Bann since the start of the 2008 financial year. This includes sales on the open market, transfers between Government bodies and sales through direct negotiations with former owners and adjoining owners.

Land & Property Services (LPS) has a role in most sales of Government land and provide valuations that are often reviewed and revised during the sales process. Before sales are recommended to the disposing body the District Valuer carries out a valuation to confirm if the consideration represents best price.

Information regarding all valuations provided by Land & Property Services for all the sales is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Details of all the sales are included in the attached tables 1 to 5.

**Table 1: Sales in Upper Bann 2008-2009**

| Dept | Branch        | Location                                | Sale Price |
|------|---------------|---|------------|
| DRD  | Roads Service | Fortfield, Dromore                      | £1,200     |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Fortfield / A1 Dromore-By-Pass, Dromore | £1         |
| DSD  | DSD           | Land adjacent Oakfields, Craigavon      | £2,100     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Seagoe Road, Portadown                  | £11,000    |
| DSD  | DSD           | Carn Road, Portadown                    | £985       |
| DSD  | DSD           | Old Charlestown Road, Portadown         | £20,000    |
| DSD  | DSD           | Robert Street, Lurgan                   | £4,000     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Thornleigh, Lurgan                      | £375       |
| DSD  | DSD           | Garvaghy Park, Portadown                | £238       |
| DSD  | DSD           | Old Rectory Park, Portadown             | £400       |
| DSD  | DSD           | Edgarstown, Portadown                   | £1,700     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Thornleigh, Lurgan                      | £500       |
| DSD  | DSD           | Abercorn Park, Portadown                | £550       |
| DSD  | DSD           | Parknasilla Way, Aghagallon             | £12,000    |
| DSD  | DSD           | Taghnevan Walk, Lurgan                  | £12,000    |
| DETI | Invest NI     | Mandeville                              | £2,250     |
| DETI | Invest NI     | Halfpenny Valley                        | £1,500,000 |
| DETI | Invest NI     | Charlestown Road                        | £307,500   |

| Dept | Branch    | Location            | Sale Price |
|------|-----------|---------------------|------------|
| DETI | Invest NI | Craigavon Food Park | £300       |

**Table 2: Sales in Upper Bann 2009-2010**

| Dept | Branch        | Location                                | Sale Price |
|------|---------------|---|------------|
| DRD  | Roads Service | Ballymagin Road, Magheralin             | £500       |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Farlough Road, Portadown                | £15,500    |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Huntly Road, Banbridge                  | £1,000     |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Lurgan Road, Magheralin                 | £2,000     |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Drumgask Road, Craigavon                | £1,000     |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Ballyoran, Portadown                    | £500       |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Willow Court, Lurgan                    | £1,400     |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Drumgask Road, Craigavon                | £5,000     |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Castor Bay Road, Lurgan                 | £1,000     |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Fortfield / A1 Dromore-By-Pass, Dromore | £1         |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Meadow Lane, Craigavon                  | £90,000    |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Alexandra Avenue, Portadown             | £150       |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Cloncore Road, Portadown                | £3,000     |
| DRD  | Roads Service | St Patrick's Avenue, Craigavon          | £650       |
| DRD  | NI Water      | Kilmacrue Road, Banbridge               | £5,125     |
| DRD  | NI Water      | Scarva Road, Banbridge                  | £750       |
| DE   | SELB          | Ardmore Primary School                  | £110,000   |
| DSD  | DSD           | Lake Road, Lurgan                       | £1,225     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Land at Oakfields, Craigavon            | £6,000     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Balteagh, Craigavon                     | £1,500     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Lisniskey Lodge, Portadown              | £1,500     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Land at Kernan Gardens, Portadown       | £750       |
| DSD  | DSD           | Land at Seagoe Road, Portadown          | £10,000    |
| DSD  | DSD           | Land at Kernan Gardens, Portadown       | £400       |
| DSD  | DSD           | Cycleway at Pinebank, Craigavon         | £4,300     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Market Street, Lurgan                   | £12,500    |
| DSD  | DSD           | Pinebank, Craigavon                     | £500       |
| DSD  | DSD           | Victor Place, Dollingstown              | £1,100     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Reilly Street, Banbridge                | £6,900     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Meadowbrook, Craigavon                  | £300       |
| DSD  | DSD           | Pinebank, Tullygally                    | £3,453     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Rosevale Road, Banbridge                | £10,000    |
| DSD  | DSD           | Levin Road, Lurgan                      | £175       |
| DSD  | DSD           | Parkmore, Craigavon                     | £5         |

| Dept | Branch    | Location                    | Sale Price |
|------|-----------|-----------------------------|------------|
| DSD  | DSD       | Dublin Road/ Loughbrickland | £1,000     |
| DSD  | DSD       | Ardownen, Craigavon         | £1,200     |
| DSD  | DSD       | Churchview, Gilford         | £25,000    |
| DETI | Invest NI | Mandeville                  | £2,250     |
| DETI | Invest NI | Charlestown Road            | £20        |
| DETI | Invest NI | Craigavon Food Park         | £320       |

**Table 3: Sales in Upper Bann 2010-2011**

| Dept    | Branch        | Location                         | Sale Price |
|---------|---------------|----------------------------------|------------|
| DRD     | Roads Service | Moyraverty West Road, Craigavon  | £300       |
| DRD     | Roads Service | Derrykeeran Road, Portadown      | £2,050     |
| DRD     | Roads Service | A1 Dromore-By-Pass, Dromore      | £1         |
| DRD     | Roads Service | Church Street, Dromore           | £1,125     |
| DRD     | Roads Service | William Street, Lurgan           | £125,000   |
| DRD     | NI Water      | Lenaderg, Banbridge              | £7,500     |
| DRD     | NI Water      | Tandragee Road, Scarva           | £27,000    |
| DHSS&PS | NIFRS         | Lurgan Fire Station, Hill Street | £200,000   |
| DSD     | DSD           | Bocombra, Portadown              | £37,500    |
| DSD     | DSD           | Festival Road, Portadown         | £540       |
| DSD     | DSD           | Pinebank, Craigavon              | £1,100     |
| DSD     | DSD           | Greenhill Park, Lurgan           | £200       |
| DSD     | DSD           | Lawrencetown                     | £2,281     |
| DSD     | DSD           | Ardownen, Craigavon              | £1,200     |
| DSD     | DSD           | Loughbrickland/                  | £712,648   |
| DSD     | DSD           | Drumgor Heights                  | £1,000     |
| DSD     | DSD           | Greenhill Park, Lurgan           | £1,000     |
| DSD     | DSD           | Parkmore, Craigavon              | £1,125     |
| DSD     | DSD           | West Street, Portadown           | £3,000     |
| DSD     | DSD           | Kenlis Street, Banbridge         | £15,000    |
| DETI    | Invest NI     | Mandeville                       | £3,750     |
| DETI    | Invest NI     | Halfpenny Valley                 | £35,500    |
| DETI    | Invest NI     | Charlestown Road                 | £1,500,000 |
| DETI    | Invest NI     | Craigavon Food Park              | £300       |

**Table 4: Sales in Upper Bann 2011- 29th February 2012**

| Dept | Branch        | Location                  | Sale Price |
|------|---------------|---------------------------|------------|
| DRD  | Roads Service | Cascum Lane, Banbridge    | £5,000     |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Banbridge Road, Kinallen  | £2,000     |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Old Manse Road, Banbridge | £9,000     |



| Dept | Branch        | Location                                      | Sale Price |
|------|---------------|---|------------|
| DRD  | Roads Service | Union Street, Lurgan                          | £17,500    |
| DRD  | Roads Service | Bannview Road, Banbridge                      | £500       |
| DRD  | Translink     | Surplus land at Lough Road, Lurgan            | £17,500    |
| DOJ  | PSNI          | Former PSNI station at Castle Street, Gilford | £130,000   |
| DSD  | DSD           | Oakfields, Craigavon                          | £1,350     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Ballynamoney Lane, Lurgan                     | £87,000    |
| DSD  | DSD           | Site at Carbet Road, Portadown                | £13,500    |
| DSD  | DSD           | Land adjacent to Gobhan Close, Portadown      | £1,500     |
| DSD  | DSD           | Carbet Road, Portadown                        | £15,000    |
| DSD  | DSD           | Drumgor Heights, Craigavon                    | £35,000    |
| DSD  | DSD           | Ashgrove Road, Portadown                      | £2,826     |

**Table 5: Sales of NIHE Houses in Upper Bann 2008- 29th February 2012**

| Dept | Branch | Year and number of sales            | Market Value | Sale Price |
|------|--------|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| DSD  | NIHE   | 2008-2009 - 1 Tenanted House Sale   | £65,000      | £49,600    |
| DSD  | NIHE   | 2009-2010 - 20 Tenanted House Sales | £1,539,000   | £1,129,760 |
| DSD  | NIHE   | 2010-2011 - 20 Tenanted House Sales | £1,103,000   | £786,814   |
| DSD  | NIHE   | 2011-2012 - 13 Tenanted House Sales | £667,000     | £461,140   |

**Note 1** – Sale Prices for Tenanted House Sales are the discounted sale prices.

Market Values for NIHE Tenanted House Sales are not assessed by LPS

### Civil Service: Pay Bands

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of people currently working in pay bands (a) 1; (b) 2; and (c) 3 in each Department, broken down by gender.

**(AQW 8262/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The total number of permanent staff working in pay bands 1 to 3 in each of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments, broken down by gender is set out in the tables overleaf. Data in relation to the Senior Civil Service is not normally disaggregated into pay bands, however the information attached was gathered as a special exercise for the 2010 NICS Gender Review.

#### NICS Permanent Staff at Pay band 1

##### Breakdown by Department and Gender @ 1st Jan 2010

|        | Gender |        | Total |
|--------|--------|--------|-------|
|        | Male   | Female |       |
| DARD   | 13     | 3      | 16    |
| DCAL   | 2      | 2      | 4     |
| DE     | 5      | 9      | 14    |
| DETI   | 6      | 2      | 8     |
| DFP    | 28     | 6      | 34    |
| DEL    | 2      | 6      | 8     |
| DHSSPS | 11     | 10     | 21    |
| DOE    | 7      | 2      | 9     |
| DRD    | 13     | 0      | 13    |

|              | Gender     |           | Total      |
|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|
|              | Male       | Female    |            |
| DSD          | 8          | 5         | 13         |
| OFMDFM       | 12         | 8         | 20         |
| NIO          | 15         | 10        | 25         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>122</b> | <b>63</b> | <b>185</b> |

**NICS Permanent Staff at Pay bands 2& 3  
Breakdown by Department and Gender @ 1st Jan 2010**

|              | Gender    |           | Total     |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|              | Male      | Female    |           |
| DARD         | 5         | 0         | 5         |
| DCAL         | 2         | 0         | 2         |
| DE           | 5         | 0         | 5         |
| DETI         | 1         | 0         | 1         |
| DFP          | 10        | 0         | 10        |
| DEL          | 1         | 2         | 3         |
| DHSSPS       | 3         | 2         | 5         |
| DOE          | 2         | 1         | 3         |
| DRD          | 2         | 2         | 4         |
| DSD          | 4         | 1         | 5         |
| OFMDFM       | 6         | 3         | 9         |
| NIO          | 5         | 2         | 7         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>46</b> | <b>13</b> | <b>59</b> |

**Notes:**

Data sourced from HRConnect at 1st January 2010.

Excludes Casual staff.

Staff numbers are provided on a headcount basis.

Includes all permanent staff, including those on career breaks and secondment

**Postage and Printing Costs**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, give elected representatives the choice of receiving reports and all other correspondence by email to minimise postage and printing costs. **(AQW 8425/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Department of Finance and Personnel corresponds with elected representatives by email, unless specifically requested otherwise. Elected representatives are advised of the publication of reports by the Department and its arm's-length bodies, by means of a letter detailing how the publication can be accessed and/or downloaded from the relevant website. Hard copies are available for elected representatives on request.

**Civil Service: Claims for Property Damage**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the arrangements that are in place which permit civil servants and public servants to claim for damage to their personal property whilst at work; (ii) whether negligence on the part of the employer, employee or agent, is necessary for any such pay-outs, or whether goodwill or no fault payments are available; (iii) what restrictions or exemptions apply; (iv) how compensation is determined; and (v) what compensation has been paid out in each of the last five years, including the largest and smallest amounts paid in respect of individual claims.

**(AQW 8531/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The NICS has a policy where a Department may compensate an employee for personal property lost or damaged whilst at work. Each claim is decided on by the employing Department. Compensation is not paid in cases where the employee has been negligent or where the item is covered by insurance for loss or damage. The amount of compensation is calculated as the current cost of replacing the items less an amount representing depreciation or full cost of repair.

A copy of the policy can be found in Chapter 9 (Travel and Subsistence section 9.18) of the NICS HR Handbook available from the DFP website at [www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/working-in-the-nics](http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/working-in-the-nics).

The compensation paid out to civil servants in each of the last five years is set out the following table:

|                                   | 2007     | 2008   | 2009     | 2010      | 2011     |
|-----------------------------------|----------|--------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Total Compensation Paid           | 4,986.47 | 863.55 | 3,662.87 | 14,493.81 | 5,535.84 |
| Highest Amount Paid to Individual | 1,250.00 | 143.13 | 2,825.00 | 12,500.00 | 2,000.00 |
| Lowest Amount Paid to Individual  | 10.00    | 29.95  | 13.25    | 12.00     | 16.49    |

### Trade Union: Secondment

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of (a) full-time; and (b) part-time staff who are currently on secondment from his Department, or its arm's length bodies, to each recognised trade union; (ii) the salary scale for each secondee; and (iii) the length of each secondment to date.

**(AQW 8778/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** There are three full-time officers and no part-time officers on secondment from DFP to NIPSA.

One officer is on the salary scale between £23336 and £26086 and two officers are on the salary scale between £18038 and £22180. Two officers have been seconded for 5 years 6 months and one officer has been seconded for 5 years 9 months.

### Economy: Expected Growth

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the expected growth of the economy in 2012/13.

**(AQW 8783/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Current global economic conditions are extremely challenging. While some sectors of our local economy are continuing to perform relatively well, it is clear that the recovery for others will take longer.

Towards the end of last year (29 November 2011) the Office for Budget Responsibility revised its growth forecasts for the UK as a whole for 2012 downwards to 0.7%. There are no official regional forecasts for Northern Ireland but if the pace of the UK's recovery overall is slower than previously hoped then this will have implications for the pace of growth in all regions including Northern Ireland.

### Procurement Process: Undisclosed Information

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the Central Procurement Directorate's recommended course of action when a failure to disclose relevant information on an application form comes to light during a tender or procurement process.

**(AQW 8995/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The action to be taken will be dependant on the nature of the undisclosed information and when it came to light during the procurement process. If it is considered that knowledge of the information would have had an influence on decisions made during the selection or award stages of a tender competition, then those stages of the process may need to be re-assessed or re-run. Each incidence would be treated on a case by case basis, bearing in mind the principles of transparency, fairness and a competitive process.

In addition, under Regulation 23 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended), (the Regulations), a contracting authority which has actual knowledge that a tenderer has been convicted of certain offences including conspiracy, corruption, bribery, or fraud, (as defined in the Regulations), must exclude the applicant from the selection process.

However where an applicant has, for example, been convicted of offences relating to the conduct of his business or has committed an act of grave misconduct in the course of his business or profession, the contracting authority has the option to exclude the applicant from selection.

### Procurement Process: Monitoring Function

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the criteria used to determine whether a conflict of interest exists when a company, which previously carried out a monitoring function for a scheme, wishes to tender for a replacement or follow-on scheme.

**(AQW 8996/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** A conflict of interest declaration must be completed by all companies tendering for public procurement contracts.

If a contracting authority becomes aware of a potential conflict of interest, it will consider whether or not the bidder in question should be allowed to participate in the process, depending on the specific circumstances in each case. However it is not proportionate and not lawful to require the automatic exclusion of all such persons without having given them an opportunity to show that there was no risk to competition.

The Chairperson of the selection and evaluation panels must also ensure panel members have no conflict of interest at all stages of the procurement process and complete the appropriate conflict of interest declarations/confidentiality agreements. The purpose of this is to confirm that panel members do not have any external personal, professional or monetary interests in the tenders they are being asked to evaluate.

Should a conflict of interest be identified, the Chairperson will decide on the appropriate course of action, taking account of advice from the Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE), to ensure that there is no distortion of competition and record the outcome.

During the life of a public project managers will also consider the potential conflict of risks in the management of a public project, which will involve a number of stakeholders throughout its life cycle.

### **Economy: Impact of Euro Crisis**

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the potential long-term implications of the Euro crisis to the Northern Ireland economy.

**(AQW 9000/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Current global economic conditions are extremely challenging and towards the end of last year (29th November 2011) the Office for Budget Responsibility revised its 2012 growth forecasts for the UK as a whole downwards to 0.7%. In particular, the OBR recognised that the situation in the euro area is likely to undermine confidence and lead to tighter credit conditions for households and firms going forward.

While there are no official regional forecasts for Northern Ireland, clearly any situation such as the euro crisis which impacts on the pace of the UK's recovery overall will have implications for the pace of growth in all regions including Northern Ireland.

However on the assumption that the euro area finds a way through the current crisis that delivers sovereign debt sustainability, the OBR expects the UK economy to grow by 2.1 per cent in 2013, 2.7 per cent in 2014, and 3.0 per cent in 2015 and 2016. And while much uncertainty remains around this, the expectation of a return of stronger growth over the next few years is at least encouraging in these difficult times.

### **Procurement Process: Guidelines**

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to paragraph 258 of the Report on the Inquiry into Public Procurement in Northern Ireland, what guidance his Department gives to a panel assessing a tender which is unsure about any element of an application or an applicant's ability to meet the criteria.

**(AQW 9011/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) has published two guidance notes in relation to the selection and assessment of tenders. They are "The Selection and Pre-qualification of Contractors" (Procurement Guidance Note 04/10) and "The Procedures and Principles for the Evaluation of Tenders" (Procurement Guidance Note 02/09).

The guidance sets out a clearly defined process which must be followed by evaluation panels to ensure consistency of approach, transparency and equality of treatment. Tender evaluation panels are required to assess each tender on the basis of the information supplied.

In line with the guidance the Chair of the assessment panel may seek clarification via the Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) in relation to any element of the application on behalf of panel members, if required. In so doing CoPEs ensure that other applicants are not placed at a disadvantage.

### **Building Regulations**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the next major updated building regulations will be published, and whether lessons have been learned from England and Wales.

**(AQW 9079/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** It is proposed to make a major revision to the Building Regulations by 30 March 2012. However this is dependent on final clearances being given, and may be subject to variation.

When reviewing the requirements of the Northern Ireland Building Regulations the Department takes into consideration revisions that have been, or are being, made to the building regulations in England and Wales. Such revisions are made based on the outcomes of research which has been undertaken by the Department for Communities and Local Government on behalf of the UK administrations.

Included in the proposed Northern Ireland (NI) updated regulations, will be amendments to the standards for the conservation of fuel and power, ventilation, sound insulation and reducing the risk of scalding, all of which have already been made in England

and Wales. In general, implementation in England and Wales has been positive. If appropriate, the same revisions will be adopted for NI (e.g. the use of accredited details in place of pre-completion sound insulation testing) however it is proposed that some revisions will not be adopted (e.g. removal of internal door closures in flats). There are also circumstances where variation from the England and Wales implementation is justified in the circumstances which prevail in NI, e.g. installation of carbon monoxide alarms where solid fuel or oil fired appliances are being replaced or installed will extend in NI to all appliances regardless of fuel.

### Building Control: Data-sharing Pilot

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the building control data sharing pilot between Belfast City Council and Antrim Borough Council, whether (i) this will be extended to all councils; and (ii) his Department will be issuing guidance.

**(AQW 9080/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Land & Property Services (LPS) and Councils Building Control representatives have been reviewing the specification of property survey details required in the rating service and the options for how the details could be provided. The investigations are being conducted through the newly formed Property Services Liaison Group and the outcome will be presented to Building Control Managers at their Annual General Meeting on 19th April 2012.

A key point in the investigations is that LPS has been trying to work across Government so that property information needed for a variety of reasons can be collected by one visit to the property.

Following the Building Control meeting in April, Councils will be invited to comment on their capacity and willingness to provide survey information under the new arrangements. The implementation of the agreed new arrangements across Councils will be subject to acceptable contractual agreements.

Guidance in this matter will be provided to Councils.

### EU Fiscal Treaty

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the potential financial implications for Northern Ireland if the electorate in the Republic of Ireland votes against the EU fiscal treaty in the forthcoming referendum.

**(AQW 9105/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Irish referendum on the treaty is very much a matter for the Irish Government and electorate to determine.

Should the Republic of Ireland fail to ratify the EU fiscal treaty, it is my understanding that it would be blocked from future EU bailout funding. So there is a clear trade-off in terms of agreeing to tighter fiscal controls and protecting against the risk of any future financial crises.

While there are no direct financial implications for Northern Ireland, obviously we have close links with the Republic of Ireland, particularly in terms of trade and our banking systems. So having a stable and prosperous Irish economy is very much in our interests here in Northern Ireland in both regards.

### Hospitality: Spend

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 8071/11-15, whether the figures provided include his Department's arm's-length bodies; and if not, to provide this information for each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9266/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The figures previously provided in response to AQW 8071/11-15 include the Department's arms-length bodies, and as such no further information is required.

### Individual Voluntary Arrangements

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people in each constituency have entered into Individual Voluntary Arrangements in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 9400/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The table below shows the number of people entering into Individual Voluntary Arrangements (IVAs) broken down by constituency and financial year since 1 April 2008 to 8 March 2012.

| Constituency  | 08/09 | 09/10 | 10/11 | 11/12 <sup>(1)</sup> |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|----------------------|
| Belfast East  | 31    | 37    | 46    | 78                   |
| Belfast North | 49    | 54    | 74    | 57                   |
| Belfast South | 34    | 41    | 55    | 25                   |
| Belfast West  | 20    | 35    | 41    | 40                   |

| Constituency                | 08/09      | 09/10      | 10/11       | 11/12 <sup>(1)</sup> |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|----------------------|
| East Antrim                 | 50         | 58         | 57          | 65                   |
| East Londonderry            | 39         | 62         | 35          | 59                   |
| Fermanagh & South Tyrone    | 19         | 24         | 34          | 42                   |
| Foyle                       | 29         | 35         | 56          | 60                   |
| Lagan Valley                | 52         | 75         | 70          | 71                   |
| Mid Ulster                  | 18         | 19         | 40          | 47                   |
| Newry & Armagh              | 34         | 31         | 45          | 42                   |
| North Antrim                | 37         | 45         | 56          | 76                   |
| North Down                  | 45         | 65         | 82          | 56                   |
| South Antrim                | 32         | 50         | 68          | 77                   |
| South Down                  | 25         | 39         | 55          | 75                   |
| Strangford                  | 53         | 49         | 81          | 74                   |
| Upper Bann                  | 33         | 63         | 74          | 80                   |
| West Tyrone                 | 19         | 32         | 33          | 30                   |
| Unknown <sup>(2)</sup>      | 23         | 10         | 20          | 18                   |
| <b>Total Number of IVAs</b> | <b>642</b> | <b>824</b> | <b>1022</b> | <b>1072</b>          |

(1) 2011/2012 IVAs up to 8 March 2012.

(2) The number of IVAs where postcode data was unavailable

## Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

### Diabetes: Insulin Pump Therapy

**Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why there has been a delay in issuing pumps to patients with diabetes; and what plans he has to speed up this process.

**(AQW 9013/11-15)**

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** In June 2009 my Department endorsed National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) Technology Appraisal No. 151 which sets out recommendations on the use of insulin pump therapy. The HSC has been working to provide access to insulin pumps in line with the Institute's guidance and significant progress has been made; however due to competing pressures for limited health and social care funding, there are currently waiting lists to start treatment.

Additional funding was secured in 2011-12 for an additional 80 pumps which will be made available for children this year and into 2012-13. I have also allocated additional funding of £2.5 million which has been used to procure an additional 1,100 insulin pumps for adults and children. These will be phased in over the four year period to 2015-16. Nonetheless, the HSC continues to experience a rising demand for clinical and cost-effective treatments and medical devices, and further resources will be required to ensure that the therapies and the associated infrastructure required to support them can be provided.

### Hospitals: Staff Vacancies

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current number of positions for (i) consultants; (ii) registrars; (iii) senior house officers; and (iv) pre-registration house officers in each hospital, in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

**(AQW 9058/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Information on the number of funded positions within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care at the above grades, by hospital, is given in the table below.

Number of funded posts for Consultants, Specialty Registrars, Foundation House Officer 2 and Foundation House Officer 1 within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care by Hospital as at March 2012

| Trust         | Hospital                                     | Whole-time Equivalent |                     |                            |                            |
|---------------|--|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
|               |  | Consultant            | Specialty Registrar | Foundation House Officer 2 | Foundation House Officer 1 |
| Belfast       | Royal Victoria                               | 280.50                | 355.40              |                            | 45.00                      |
|               | Belfast City                                 | 195.88                | 153.10              |                            | 34.00                      |
|               | Greenpark                                    | 41.09                 | 37.20               |                            | 3.00                       |
|               | Mater  | 36.13                 | 43.00               |                            | 15.00                      |
|               | Joint Hospital Teams                         | 52.66                 | 76.68               |                            | 0.00                       |
|               | Community Facilities                         | 14.25                 | 0.00                |                            | 0.00                       |
| Northern      | Antrim                                       | 123.30                | 104.23              | 28.00                      | 27.00                      |
|               | Causeway                                     | 50.32                 | 33.00               | 13.00                      | 14.00                      |
|               | Holywell                                     | 21.75                 | 9.50                | 0.00                       | 0.00                       |
|               | Mid Ulster                                   | 3.00                  | 2.00                | 0.00                       | 0.00                       |
|               | Whiteabbey                                   | 1.70                  | 0.00                | 0.00                       | 0.00                       |
| South Eastern | Ards   | 8.60                  | 0.00                | 2.00                       | 0.00                       |
|               | Downe  | 14.83                 | 9.00                | 6.00                       | 6.00                       |
|               | Lagan Valley                                 | 26.07                 | 9.80                | 4.00                       | 9.00                       |
|               | Ulster                                       | 144.05                | 137.20              | 32.01                      | 28.00                      |
| Southern      | Craigavon Area                               | 122.44                | 120.10              | 28.00                      | 21.00                      |
|               | Daisy Hill                                   | 41.97                 | 35.60               | 7.00                       | 12.00                      |
|               | St Luke's                                    | 8.60                  | 5.60                | 2.00                       | 0.00                       |
|               | South Tyrone                                 | 3.40                  | 0.00                | 0.00                       | 0.00                       |
|               | Lurgan, Armagh Community and Other Community | 5.90                  | 3.60                | 0.00                       | 0.00                       |
| Western       | Altnagelvin                                  | 141.19                | 143.00              |                            | 24.00                      |
|               | Erne   | 44.95                 | 34.00               |                            | 10.00                      |
|               | Tyrone County                                | 6.00                  | 0.00                |                            | 0.00                       |
|               | Community Facilities                         | 26.70                 | 19.00               |                            | 0.00                       |

**Source:** Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts – Figures have not been validated by the DHSSPS.

**Notes:**

- Under Modernising Medical Careers, grading within the Medical and Dental Occupational Family was replaced by a new system. Information has therefore been provided within the new grading system framework.
- Belfast and Western Trusts encountered a coding issue between Specialty Registrars and Foundation House Officers Year 2, therefore due to the timescale for answering this AQW, these two staff groups have been combined.
- Belfast Trust advised that splitting those staff working in Joint Hospital Teams into individual hospitals would involve a large-scale exercise which would involve allocating the number of hours spent at each individual hospital for each doctor / dentist within the team.
- Some of the Trusts have also provided information for their community facilities.

### Public Health Agency: Local Government Representative Members

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the appointments of two local government representatives to the Public Health Agency, to detail (i) whether the positions were advertised; (ii) how many applications were received, broken down by membership of political parties; (iii) how many applicants were interviewed, broken down by membership of political parties; and (iv) why representatives from different political parties were not appointed, **(AQW 9116/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:**

- (i) The appointment of two (2) Local Government Representative Members to the Public Health Agency was advertised by way of an "Information Flyer" which was issued to each individual District Councillor throughout the 26 District Councils. The Flyer was also issued to the Chief Executives of all District Councils requesting that they bring the information to the attention of the District Councillors serving in their area. A copy of the "Information Flyer" was also sent to the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA).
- (ii) A total of 21 applications were received. The table below shows a breakdown by membership of political parties.

| Political Party                         | Number of Applications |
|---|------------------------|
| Alliance                                | 1                      |
| Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)         | 6                      |
| Green Party                             | 1                      |
| Independent                             | 1                      |
| Sinn Fein (SF)                          | 3                      |
| Social Democratic & Labour Party (SDLP) | 5                      |
| Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)             | 4                      |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>21</b>              |

- (iii) A total of twelve (12) applicants were interviewed. The table below shows the number of applicants interviewed and a breakdown by membership of their respective political party.

| Political Party                         | Number of Applicants Interviewed |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Alliance                                | 1                                |
| Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)         | 4                                |
| Green Party                             | 1                                |
| Independent                             | Nil                              |
| Sinn Fein (SF)                          | Nil                              |
| Social Democratic & Labour Party (SDLP) | 4                                |
| Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)             | 2                                |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>12</b>                        |

- (iv) The appointments to the Public Health Agency were made in accordance with the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland and as with appointments to all Health and Social Care bodies, is a matter of Ministerial choice. Initially two applicants from two different political parties were appointed, however one of those was unable to accept the appointment due to health problems.

### Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Voluntary Redundancies

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the estimated number of people who might take voluntary redundancy within Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's (a) Income Department, should the office relocate to Omagh; and (b) Payment Department, should the office relocate to Ballymena; (ii) number of people who might take voluntary redundancy within the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area as a result of the office relocations in the Shared Services proposals; and (iv) to provide an estimate of how much the redundancy might cost in total, as a result of the shared services proposals. **(AQW 9120/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The Belfast HSC Trust has advised me that they are in the midst of a process of staff engagement in relation to these issues and are unable to give any estimates until the outcome of the consultation is known.



## Resuscitation

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether he considered including community resuscitation in the Programme for Government; and (ii) for his assessment of the British Heart Foundation's campaign for the inclusion of a community resuscitation strategy in the Programme for Government.

**(AQW 9132/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** You will have noted the concerted effort, across the Executive, to restrict the Programme for Government Targets to a smaller number that are sharply focused and outcome based.

The Programme for Government is concerned with major strategic developments rather than existing provisions. Standard 9 of the Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing Service Framework requires Health and Social Care professionals to work with schools, workplaces and communities to raise awareness of, and access to, emergency life support skills. The implementation of this standard will mean that many more people will have access to ELS training.

In addition a regional business case application to fund Community Development Resuscitation Officers in each Trust is currently with the Health and Social Care Board for consideration.

## Northern Ireland Electronic Care Pilot Project: Hewlett Packard

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8019/11-15, to detail (i) Hewlett Packard's role in this project; (ii) whether it was awarded the contract on the basis that it will be the prime contractor; and (iii) the selection process.

**(AQW 9176/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Hewlett Packard's role in the Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record project is to provide procurement services under the Technology Partner Agreement. The Agreement is a framework aimed at providing an efficient and effective route to the procurement of a broad range of ICT equipment and services. Hewlett Packard's role in the procurement of the Northern Ireland Electronic Care Record will be to engage with the supplier to provide the technical solution.

The framework was awarded to Hewlett Packard in August 2009 following a fully compliant OJEU procurement under the Public Contract Regulations 2006 which was conducted using the competitive dialogue procedure provided for in those regulations. The framework was let for a period of 4 years and will be due for renewal in 2013.

## Emergency Life Support Skills

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) whether his Department has any intentions of collaborating with the Department of Education to seek to introduce the compulsory delivery of Emergency Life Support Skills in schools, workplaces and communities; and (ii) a timescale for the implementation of the strategy.

**(AQW 9240/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Compulsory teaching of Emergency Life Support (ELS) skills in schools is a matter for the Minister for Education to consider.

Standard 9 of the Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing Service Framework requires Health and Social Care professionals to work with schools, workplaces and communities to raise awareness of, and access to, emergency life support skills. The implementation of this standard will mean that many more people will have access to ELS training.

I will be meeting the Minister for Education in the near future to discuss a range of matters that are of mutual interest and we will be discussing ELS training in schools at that meeting.

## Child/Adult Protection: Vetting and Barring Scheme

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of (i) the Vetting and Barring Scheme; and (ii) the maintenance of the Independent Safeguarding Authority's barred lists for the children and vulnerable adult sectors.

**(AQW 9270/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The Vetting and Barring Scheme was introduced for the purpose of strengthening child and adult protection arrangements in certain work place situations, that is, those situations which provide significant access to children and vulnerable adults. I remain committed to the Vetting and Barring Scheme and to its implementation on a cross-border basis. We are in the process of putting in place legislation, which will support changes to the Scheme recommended by a review of the Scheme conducted in 2010. In my view, those changes will achieve a more balanced approach, which continues to have the protection of children and vulnerable adults as its core aim.

The Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) assumed responsibility for barring decision-making from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Education in March 2009 under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007. Subject to the conclusion of the successful passage of the Protection of Freedoms Bill at Westminster, the ISA will be subsumed into a new Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) later this year. Northern Ireland Ministers have agreed that the barring function of the Disclosure and Barring Service will extend to Northern Ireland, undertaking the role previously undertaken by the ISA. As is currently the case with the ISA, Northern Ireland will have representation on the Board of the new DBS.

**Dental Services: Tyrone County Hospital**

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) why the Western Health and Social Care Trust is proposing the withdrawal of the paediatric dental service at the Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh; and (ii) why the decision has been taken without any prior consultation.

**(AQW 9300/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that no paediatric services have been withdrawn from Tyrone County Hospital, however for reasons of patient safety day case paediatric surgery including dental surgery is currently the subject of review. The outcome of that review and any proposals for the future delivery of paediatric surgical and dental services will be shared with political representatives and interested parties and consultation will take place if required.

**Dental Services: Tyrone County Hospital**

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the proposed withdrawal of the paediatric dental service at the Tyrone County Hospital, what additional resources will be put in place at the Erne Hospital, Enniskillen and Altnagelvin Hospital, Londonderry, to cater for 2-14 year olds from Omagh who require multiple teeth extractions.

**(AQW 9304/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I am advised by the Western Health and Social Care Trust that the paediatric dental service continues to be provided at Tyrone County Hospital but as is the case with paediatric surgery at the Hospital the service is currently the subject of a clinical incident review. I understand the outcome of that review and any proposals for the future delivery of paediatric surgical and dental services will be shared with political representatives and interested parties as required.

**Dental Services: Tyrone County Hospital**

**Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the proposed withdrawal of the paediatric dental service at the Tyrone County Hospital and given that 239 children used this service last year, for his assessment of the potential waiting times for children from the Omagh area if the service is withdrawn, considering that the current waiting times at the Erne Hospital, Enniskillen and Altnagelvin Hospital, Londonderry, exceed six weeks.

**(AQW 9305/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I am advised by the Western Health and Social Care Trust that if a paediatric dental patient had to be referred to the Erne at present they would be offered an appointment within 2 – 3 weeks. If a paediatric dental patient had to be referred to Altnagelvin at present they would be offered an appointment within 3 weeks. The Trust is increasing the number of paediatric dental patients being seen on the current lists. They have an additional session in the Erne Hospital with the possibility of another additional session per month if required.

**Physiotherapy Graduates: Employment**

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8238/11-15, what specific actions his Department is taking to assist physiotherapy graduates who are currently unemployed.

**(AQW 9309/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** My Department carries out workforce reviews for each clinical professional group, including physiotherapy. This provides information to support decision making on the commissioned numbers required to support service delivery. For 2010/11, the commissioned number was reduced by 10 to 59 and has remained at this level for 2011/12 to reflect both the current and projected level of demand for newly qualified staff.

Trusts have a limited number of substantive posts for physiotherapy graduates and the Department is currently assessing the commissioning position for the 12/13 academic year.

**Northern Ireland Electronic Care Pilot Project: Hewlett Packard**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8019/11-15 (i) whether the contract awarded to Hewlett Packard, as part of the Northern Ireland Electronic Records Project, was put out to tender, and if not, to explain the rationale for this decision; (ii) how much Hewlett Packard has estimated that it will charge his Department for carrying out the work; and (iii) how much it has billed his Department to date.

**(AQW 9328/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The contract awarded to Hewlett Packard was as a result of a tendering exercise. Hewlett Packard will charge £33k for carrying out the work, none of which has been billed to date.

**Suicide: Alcohol/Drug Dependency**

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people aged (a) under 25; (b) between 25-34; (c) between 35-44; and (d) 45 and over committed suicide in each of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) of these, how many were being treated for (i) alcohol; and (b) drug dependency.

**(AQW 9335/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:**

(i) The below table gives the number of deaths registered due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'<sup>1</sup> and 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'<sup>2</sup> by age group for each year between 2008 and 2010 by Health and Social Care Trust.

1 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes X60-X84, Y87.0

2 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes Y10-Y34, Y87.2

**Table: Number of registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' and 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted' by age group and Health and Social Care Trust, 2008-2010.**

| Registration Year | Age      | Northern Ireland | Health and Social Care Trust |          |               |          |         |
|-------------------|----------|------------------|------------------------------|----------|---------------|----------|---------|
|                   |          |                  | Belfast                      | Northern | South Eastern | Southern | Western |
| 2008              | All Ages | 282              | 68                           | 55       | 37            | 69       | 53      |
|                   | Under 25 | 48               | 13                           | 7        | 7             | 12       | 9       |
|                   | 25-34    | 60               | 21                           | 11       | 7             | 14       | 7       |
|                   | 35-44    | 75               | 18                           | 13       | 14            | 17       | 13      |
|                   | 45+      | 99               | 16                           | 24       | 9             | 26       | 24      |
| 2009              | All Ages | 260              | 72                           | 54       | 32            | 47       | 55      |
|                   | Under 25 | 42               | 8                            | 10       | 6             | 7        | 11      |
|                   | 25-34    | 59               | 21                           | 14       | 5             | 10       | 9       |
|                   | 35-44    | 63               | 19                           | 13       | 11            | 9        | 11      |
|                   | 45+      | 96               | 24                           | 17       | 10            | 21       | 24      |
| 2010              | All Ages | 313              | 79                           | 65       | 65            | 51       | 53      |
|                   | Under 25 | 71               | 24                           | 13       | 16            | 5        | 13      |
|                   | 25-34    | 57               | 13                           | 10       | 14            | 9        | 11      |
|                   | 35-44    | 65               | 13                           | 19       | 11            | 12       | 10      |
|                   | 45+      | 120              | 29                           | 23       | 24            | 25       | 19      |

(ii) Information relating to the number of death due to suicide by people who were being treated for alcohol or drug dependency is not available.

**Schmallenberg Virus**

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with officials within his Department, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the potential risk to public health posed by the Schmallenberg Virus; and what protective measures his Department has or plans to put in place as a result of the threat of an outbreak.

**(AQW 9363/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** At national level a multidisciplinary expert group has assessed the likely risk to human health of Schmallenberg virus. This assessment, dated 24 February 2012, is on the Health Protection Agency's website at: [http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb\\_C/1317132996975](http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1317132996975)

In its assessment the expert group recognises that many uncertainties exist about this new virus, and considers that on the basis of current evidence it is unlikely that it poses a risk to human health. This assessment will be kept under review as more information becomes available. However, given the evolving situation and the limited evidence currently available, the group recommends surveillance of those groups of people who are at the highest risk of exposure, including occupational groups such as farmers, veterinarians and other workers handling affected animals.

DHSSPS officials have discussed Schmallenberg virus with the Chief Veterinary Officer and with the Public Health Agency (PHA). Notices about the disease have been posted on the websites of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute. Should an outbreak occur in livestock in Northern Ireland, PHA will put in place surveillance arrangements similar to those that are now in place in England.

## Human Papilloma Virus: Screening

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department intends to introduce screening for the Human Papilloma Virus in all Health and Social Care Trust areas.

**(AQW 9366/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The UK National Screening Committee (NSC) is an expert body which advises all four UK Health Departments on all aspects of screening policy. The NSC is currently considering Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) testing as part of the Cervical Cancer Screening Programme and will be making a recommendation later this year.

In the interim the Department has requested the Public Health Agency to develop proposals and associated costs of HPV testing if a decision is taken for it to be introduced in Northern Ireland. A draft paper was discussed at a meeting of the Northern Ireland Screening Committee in January and the Committee asked for further details to be added to the paper. A final paper will be sent to the Department for consideration once the Public Health Agency has updated the report.

The Western Health and Social Care Trust is also undertaking a pilot on HPV testing within the cervical screening programme. This will provide useful information on the implications of introducing such a test in Northern Ireland.

A decision on the introduction of HPV testing to the Northern Ireland Cervical Screening Programme will then be taken once all this work is complete.

## Defibrillators

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many defibrillators there are in Northern Ireland. **(AQW 9368/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** It is not known how many Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) there are in Northern Ireland as there is no register of AEDs.

The best information available is from a survey carried out by one healthcare professional approximately three years ago, which indicated that there were more than 800 AEDs in different locations across Northern Ireland including businesses, community settings and sporting organisations.

## Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan.

**(AQW 9369/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The regional multi-agency Sexual Health Improvement Network, established to oversee and drive forward the implementation of the Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan, is progressing action in the areas of prevention, training, services and research. Such action includes the introduction and establishment of the HPV immunisation programme; the rerun of the first phase of the public information campaign targeted at 17-24 year olds to raise awareness of sexual health issues, promote safer sex and empower young people to delay first sexual experience; and ongoing action to deliver information, education and personal development programmes and outreach preventative programmes.

The Network has also identified key areas for action and is currently addressing these through sub-groups set up specifically to consider STI/HIV prevention in high risk groups; sexual health services in Primary Care; Looked after Children as a vulnerable group at high risk of teenage pregnancy and STIs; and support to teachers and schools regarding Relationship and Sexuality Education

## Ear Syringing

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how he ensures that there is adequate provision of ear syringe machines in health centres; and (ii) for his assessment of the proposal not to replace the existing machine in Antrim Health Centre.

**(AQW 9397/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The provision of ear syringing is a decision for each GP practice based in Health Centres. Although this treatment is usually carried out by Trust employed staff, it is at the request of the GP. The GP practice alone is responsible for purchasing the necessary equipment and consumables required to carry out this service, and I understand replacement equipment has been ordered by the GP practices and that it should be delivered by the end of March, if not sooner.

## Ionised Water

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Health Service uses ionized water; and to outline the benefits of using ionized water.

**(AQW 9425/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Health and Social Care Trusts have indicated that they do not use ionized water. Ionized water is marketed with claims of a number of health benefits however there is no clinical evidence to support these claims. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ionized\\_water](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ionized_water) - cite\_note-latimes-0#cite\_note-latimes-0

### Down's Syndrome: Northern Health and Social Care Trust

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children with Down's Syndrome in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area, broken down by area of birth.

**(AQW 9430/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** As these figures are not available centrally within the Department, they were requested directly from the Northern HSC Trust. In response, the Trust provided the figures detailed in Tables 1 and 2 below. It is not possible to detail the figures in Table 1, by area of birth. However the figures in Table 2, detail children aged between 0-19 with Downs Syndrome born in the Northern Trust by area of birth, as at 9 March 2012.

**Table 1: Children aged between 0 - 19 Years with Downs Syndrome resident in Northern Trust as at 9 March 20121**

| Residence Area | Total |
|----------------|-------|
| Coleraine      | 24    |
| Ballymoney     | 9     |
| Moyle          | 4     |
| Antrim         | 21    |
| Ballymena      | 22    |
| Larne          | 15    |
| Carrickfergus  | 10    |
| Magherafelt    | 22    |
| Cookstown      | 12    |
| Newtownabbey   | 36    |
| Northern Trust | 175   |

1 Figures supplied by the Northern HSC Trust have not been validated by the DHSSPS.

**Table 2: Children aged between 0 - 19 Years with Downs Syndrome born in the Northern Trust as at 9 March 20121**

| Birth Area     | Total |
|----------------|-------|
| Coleraine      | 21    |
| Ballymoney     | 9     |
| Moyle          | -     |
| Antrim         | 18    |
| Ballymena      | 22    |
| Larne          | 11    |
| Carrickfergus  | 10    |
| Magherafelt    | 23    |
| Cookstown      | 12    |
| Newtownabbey   | 36    |
| Unknown        | -     |
| Northern Trust | 168   |

1 Figures supplied by the Northern HSC Trust have not been validated by the DHSSPS.

'-' less than 5 children

### Cervical Cancer: Screening Programme

**Ms Lewis** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many women have been diagnosed with cervical cancer as a result of the Cervical Screening Programme in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 9447/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** It is not known how many women have been diagnosed with cervical cancer as a result of the Northern Ireland Cervical Screening Programme, as smear tests for those women who present with symptoms are processed in the same way as those smears carried out through screening.

The most recent available full-year data on the incidence of cervical cancer are for 2009. The table below gives figures for the period 2007-2009.

#### Number of cases of cervical cancer by year of diagnosis

| Year of diagnoses | Number of cases |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 2007              | 89              |
| 2008              | 127             |
| 2009              | 119             |

**Source:** Northern Ireland Cancer Registry

### Shared Services: Public Transport

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what discussions he has had with the Minister for Regional Development in relation to the provision of public transport between Belfast and Omagh to facilitate staff who are relocated; (ii) whether he anticipates any compulsory redundancies as a result of Shared Services within (a) the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's Income Department and the Payments Department; and (b) the rest of the Health Service; and (iii) whether staff in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust will be offered the possibility of transfer to another department or location.

**(AQW 9469/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The answer to each question posed is as follows:

- (i) There have been no discussions with the Minister for Regional Development in respect of public transport links to any of the proposed shared service locations. The provision of transport will be a matter for consultation with the trade unions following a final decision on the shared services locations. A full range of transport options including car sharing, excess travel allowances, and use of Translink schemes will be considered for effectiveness and value for money;
- (ii) There are no plans for compulsory redundancy; and
- (iii) All affected staff have the right to follow their jobs. That course may not suit everyone, but every effort will be made to facilitate redeployment to posts close to current locations.

### Rare Diseases

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to launch a consultation on a local policy for rare diseases.

**(AQW 9481/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The 2009 European Commission Recommendation on Rare Disease obliges Member States to put in place a plan or strategy on rare diseases by 2013 which integrates all current and future initiatives at local, regional and national levels in the field of rare diseases. The UK Plan for Rare Diseases is being jointly produced by the four nations of the UK and a UK-wide public consultation was launched on 29 February 2012.

All responses to the consultation are being submitted directly to the Department of Health in England to co-ordinate on behalf of the four UK Health Departments. These responses, including those from Northern Ireland, will be assessed by all four Health Departments to inform the final version of the plan and resulting implementation plan.

### Dental Services: Tyrone County Hospital

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the withdrawal of Paediatric Dental Services at the Tyrone County Hospital in Omagh, why the Western Health and Social Care Trust made a decision to withdraw the service without any consultation; and if he will make the necessary arrangements to have appropriate anaesthetist cover at Tyrone County Hospital so that this important service can be reinstated immediately.

**(AQW 9502/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that the paediatric dental service continues to be provided at Tyrone County Hospital but as is the case with paediatric surgery at the Hospital the service is currently the subject of a clinical

incident review. I understand the outcome of that review and any proposals for the future delivery of paediatric surgical and dental services will be shared with political representatives and interested parties as required.

### HEMS/Air Ambulance

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3038/11-15, whether the Health and Social Care Board undertook a feasibility study on a helicopter emergency medical service; (ii) when the study was completed; and (iii) when and where the findings will be published.

**(AQW 9625/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I can confirm that, at my predecessor's request, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) commissioned consultants to undertake a feasibility study on the need for and sustainability and affordability of an HEMS/air ambulance for Northern Ireland. The HSCB expects the consultants to present a final report in April this year after which it will be submitted to my Department to consider. The Department will then decide what arrangements should be made for publication.

## Department of Justice

### Death by Careless Driving

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 6590/11-15, the answer to which was incomplete in relation to those processed through the courts on a charge of causing death by careless driving how many (i) pleaded guilty; and (ii) were acquitted.

**(AQW 7567/11-15)**

**Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice):** The offence under Article 11A, Road Traffic Act 1988, by virtue of Article 52 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, is 'Causing death or grievous bodily injury by careless driving or inconsiderate driving'. It only applies to offences committed after 16th July 2008.

Since this offence was created, full information is only available for the years 2009 and 2010:

|                          | 2009        |                    | 2010        |                    |
|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|
|                          | Crown Court | Magistrates' Court | Crown Court | Magistrates' Court |
| Prosecuted               | 4           | 12                 | 15          | 55                 |
| Guilty Plea              | 4           | 9                  | 13          | 31                 |
| Convicted                | 4           | 9                  | 14          | 33                 |
| Guilty of lesser offence | 0           | 2                  | 0           | 7                  |
| Acquitted                | 0           | 1                  | 1           | 15                 |

### HMP Maghaberry: Statement by Dr Michael Maguire

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, since Dr Michael McBride's statement in 2009 that "there is a continuing gap between the Prison Service's stated intention and the delivery on-the-ground of meaningful outcomes for prisoners, especially at Maghaberry Prison" and that room remains for recommendations to be implemented in the "spirit" in which they were intended, which recommendations have been implemented in Maghaberry Prison; and what difficulties arose in relation to the full implementation of the recommendations.

**(AQW 8530/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The comments quoted would appear to be those of Dr Michael Maguire, as set out in the CJINI report of "An Inspection of the Treatment of Vulnerable Prisoners by the Northern Ireland Prison Service" published in December 2009.

CJINI conducted a follow-up of this inspection in 2011 and published a further report in January 2012. Of the six recommendations fully accepted by the N.I. Prison Service, CJINI inspectors concluded that one had been achieved, four partially achieved and one not achieved.

The 'not achieved' recommendation is a corporate issue relating to improving the recording of constructive activities. Good progress has been made in recent months in providing more meaningful data to the Prison Service Management Board.

Three of the 'partially achieved' recommendations are also corporate issues relating to action plans, safer custody and personal officers respectively. Efforts are now being made to more closely scrutinise inspection recommendations rather than simply accept them all; it is accepted that further work is required to ensure that prison staff focus more on outcomes rather than processes when dealing with prisoners at risk of self harm; and the Director General has advised Dr Maguire that the work of personal officers will be taken forward as part of the new roles for Prison Officers under the umbrella of the SEE Programme.

The remaining 'partially achieved' recommendation relates to the establishment of a prisoner forum at Maghaberry Prison. Prisoner forums do now take place in each residential unit and as a single forum for the whole prison in the chapel (except for separated prisoners and those prisoners held in Braid House) each month.

### Prison Service: Private Investigators

**Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8124/11-15, to outline the exceptional circumstances that would merit the use of private investigators; and to detail the protocol that exists to manage this process.

**(AQW 8865/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** It is not possible to provide an exhaustive list of the circumstances where private investigators would be used as each case would be considered on its own merit. Since July 2011 the approval of the Director of Human Resources has been required before an authorisation can be given.

### Prison Service: Private Investigators

**Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7354/11-15, whether the private investigation firms that were used were vetted by the PSNI and given security clearance to carry out the investigations.

**(AQW 8869/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Prison Service has no record indicating that the firms used had obtained PSNI security clearance.

### Prison Service: Private Investigators

**Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8126/11-15, how many of the seven employees are still members of the Prison Service staff; and what disciplinary action was taken against each staff member as a result of the investigations.

**(AQW 8870/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Only one of the seven employees is still a member of the NI Prison Service. Disciplinary action was initiated against one member of staff but the case was not proven.

### Prison Service: Private Investigators

**Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8126/11-15, who authorised the use of the private investigators; and in what years.

**(AQW 8871/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Authorisation to use private investigators was given as follows –

| Year | Authorised by                           |
|------|---|
| 2006 | Head of Personnel/Director of Personnel |
| 2008 | NIPS Claims Unit                        |
| 2009 | NIPS Claims Unit                        |
| 2009 | NIPS Claims Unit                        |
| 2009 | NIPS Pay and Employee Relations Branch  |
| 2010 | NIPS Pay and Employee Relations Branch  |
| 2010 | NIPS Pay and Employee Relations Branch  |

### Prison Officers: Complaints

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Justice how many (i) complaints from prisoners; and (ii) grievances from fellow officers, have been received about the behaviour of Prison Service officers in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 8928/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The number of complaints/grievances received about the behaviour of Prison Service officers in each of the last 3 years is set out below:

| Year | No. of Complaints/Grievances<br>Prisoners Visitors Total |
|------|--|
| 2009 | 151 *not available 151                                   |
| 2010 | 373 9 382  |



| Year | No. of Complaints/Grievances<br>Prisoners Visitors Total |
|------|--|
| 2011 | 641 24 665   |

\* The figures for visitor complaints are only readily available from August 2010

### Prisons: Human Rights Violations

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the level of human rights violations in prisons.  
(AQW 8929/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** The Northern Ireland Prison Service is subject to ongoing and regular scrutiny from a number of outside bodies who are concerned with the treatment of offenders. I am not aware of any reports of human rights violations against prisoners in our care.

### Prisons: Offensive Weapons

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8082/11-15, to list the type of offensive weapons seized in each prison facility.

(AQW 8930/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** The type of offensive weapon found in each prison facility is as follows:

| Establishment   | Description  |
|---|--|
| Maghaberry  | Improvised shank                                     |
|   | Shank made of sharpened toothbrush                   |
|   | Razor blade used to self harm                        |
|   | Adapted spoon  |
|   | Knife  |
|   | 2 blades in toothbrush                               |
|   | Broken snooker cue                                   |
|   | Torn coke can  |
|   | Football sock with tin concealed inside              |
|   | Plastic knife with edge sharpened into pointed teeth |
|   | Sharpened metal spike                                |
|   | Spiked bricklaying tool                              |
|   | Double razor bladed shank                            |
|   | 1 large eraser with 3 blades                         |
|   | Large bent piece of metal                            |
|   | Metal blade stuck to lollipop stick                  |
|   | Improvised knuckle duster                            |
|   | Razor blade melted into handle of the razor          |
|   | Pen with razor melted into one end                   |
|   | Stanley knife blade                                  |
| Piece of wood sharpened to a point – found in double cell |  |
| Sharpened plastic   |  |
| Screw nail with moulded Pen shaft.                        |  |

| Establishment | Description                                    |
|---------------|--|
| Magilligan    | 4 inch long metal blade                        |
|               | Double blade melted into razor handle          |
|               | Stanley knife                                  |
|               | Unauthorised tool                              |
|               | 6 inch nail sharpened to a point               |
|               | razor blades                                   |
|               | Toilet brush handle                            |
|               | Large nail                                     |
|               | Shank made from dental tool                    |
|               | 2 blades and melted plastic knife              |
| Magilligan    | Plastic curtain rail with 3 screws attached    |
|               | 2 razor blades melted onto a toothbrush handle |
|               | Unspecified                                    |
| Hydebank Wood | Metal rod                                      |
|               | 4 inch screw                                   |
|               | Metal bar                                      |
|               | Knife  |
|               | Shank  |
|               | Unspecified                                    |
|               | Sharpened toothbrush                           |
|               | Razor blades attached to toothbrush            |
|               | Replica firearm made from clay                 |
|               | Razor blade in pen holder                      |
|               | Razor blade                                    |

### HMP Maghaberry: Incident on 30 July 2011

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the incident in HMP Maghaberry on 30 July 2011 (i) what damage was caused; (ii) what was the cost of repairing the damage; (iii) in what section of the prison the incident occurred; (iv) whether any staff were injured; (v) how many prisoners were involved; and (vi) what action was taken against those involved.

**(AQW 9003/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Maghaberry prison has no record of an incident taking place on 30 July 2011 that involved damage to property by prisoners, injury caused to staff or prisoners or would have breached the good order and safety of the prison.

### Prisoners: Drug Use

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8058/11-15, to list the types of drugs seized in each prison facility. **(AQW 9007/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The type of drugs seized in each prison facility as a result of the searches outlined in AQW 8058/11-15 are as follows:

- Maghaberry – amphetamines, barbiturates, benzodiazepines, cannabinoids, cocaine, opiates, steroids and non specified drugs.
- Magilligan – amphetamines, barbiturates, benzodiazepines, buprenorphine, cannabinoids, cocaine, opiates, steroids and non specified drugs.
- Hydebank Wood – amphetamines, benzodiazepines, cannabinoids, cocaine, steroids and non specified drugs.

## Court Cases: Non-jury

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Justice how many non-jury court cases have taken place in each of the last ten years. (AQW 9072/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** The table below details the number of non-jury cases disposed of in the Crown Court each year from 2002.

### Non-Jury Cases and Defendants Dealt With in the Crown Court

| Year                | Defendants | Cases |
|---------------------|------------|-------|
| 2002                | 113        | 72    |
| 2003                | 111        | 71    |
| 2004                | 77         | 65    |
| 2005                | 90         | 49    |
| 2006                | 91         | 61    |
| 2007                | 113        | 64    |
| 2008                | 72         | 33    |
| 2009                | 41         | 17    |
| 2010                | 28         | 17    |
| 2011 <sup>[1]</sup> | 24         | 15    |

[1] 2011 figures are provisional.

## Ulster Farmers' Union

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Justice what initiatives his Department has introduced which have involved the Ulster Farmers' Union. (AQW 9085/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** The forthcoming Community Safety Strategy will support efforts to make rural communities safer through preventing and reducing rural crime.

Following consideration of the Strategy by the Justice Committee and Executive, my officials will be working with other Departmental officials to develop a Community Safety Strategy Action plan. Consideration will be given to the delivery partners that are needed for all the strands of the Strategy, including that on rural crime. We would anticipate that the delivery partners will include other Government departments as well as the voluntary and community sector, and potentially the UFU.

The new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, due to be established in April 2012, will have a key role in engaging and empowering individuals and communities to find solutions to locally identified concerns. Organisations representing the rural community can take the opportunity to engage with their local Policing and Community Safety Partnership, ensuring that their voice is heard.

There have been a number of events that the Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) have been directly involved in, including an advice centre on rural crime prevention, led by Larne District Policing Partnerships (DPP) and the PSNI in Larne, which was held on 5 December 2011. Another one was held in Larne on 14 March 2012.

In Ballymena there was a rural crime seminar held in November 2011 which was a partnership between the UFU, PSNI, Ballymena DPP & CSP. There was also a trailer marking event held in December 2011 with a further event on 13 March, all of which the UFU have been involved in.

There have been trailer marking events held throughout Northern Ireland which have involved the UFU including the PSNI's Farm Security Initiative.

Community Safety Partnerships have run events that have not directly involved the UFU but UFU have been kept up to date and local farmers have attended.

I met with Ulster Farmers Union to discuss Rural Crime and Policing on Tuesday 28 June 2011. The issue of not securing firearms was covered and remains a major concern. If a firearm is stolen as a result, the certificate holder is in breach of FAC conditions. In these circumstances the Chief Constable will revoke the FAC. The UFU members were encouraged to remind their colleagues of the law and guidance on firearms.

### Court Cases: Non-jury

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Justice how many non-jury court cases, outside of petty sessions, have taken place in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 9097/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The table below details the number of non-jury cases disposed of in the Crown Court in each year from 2002.

#### Non-Jury Cases and Defendants Dealt With in the Crown Court

| Year                | Defendants | Cases |
|---------------------|------------|-------|
| 2002                | 113        | 72    |
| 2003                | 111        | 71    |
| 2004                | 77         | 65    |
| 2005                | 90         | 49    |
| 2006                | 91         | 61    |
| 2007                | 113        | 64    |
| 2008                | 72         | 33    |
| 2009                | 41         | 17    |
| 2010                | 28         | 17    |
| 2011 <sup>[1]</sup> | 24         | 15    |

[1] 2011 figures are provisional.

### Non-molestation Orders

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Justice how many Non-Molestation Orders have been issued in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 9101/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Full year figures are only available since 2008 when the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service's Integrated Courts Operating System was introduced and collated electronic records.

The table below sets out the total number of Non-Molestation Orders issued in each of the last four years.

|              | 2008         | 2009         | 2010         | 2011         |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Total</b> | <b>7,759</b> | <b>7,370</b> | <b>6,598</b> | <b>7,028</b> |

#### Notes:

- (i) 2011 data is provisional.
- (ii) Includes interim and final orders.
- (iii) More than one order may be made in an individual case.

### Car-jacking

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Justice what action his Department is taking to tackle car-jacking crime.

**(AQW 9129/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Carjacking was the subject of a No Named Day Motion in the Assembly on 28 February and the details requested are contained within the Hansard record of that day, which is widely available.

The issue of car-jacking is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board. However, I have met with the Chief Constable about this issue and I have offered him all the necessary support of the Department in his efforts to tackle this crime.

## Elderly People: Victims of Crime

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Justice what action his Department is taking to tackle crimes against elderly people. (AQW 9130/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** The safety of older and vulnerable people and ensuring they can live their lives free from the fear of becoming a victim of crime is a key priority for my Department and the wider Executive, as set out in the draft Programme for Government.

In Northern Ireland crimes against older people, especially violent crimes are relatively rare. Statistics show that people aged 65 or over are least likely to be the victims of violent crime, accounting for less than 2% of such victims last year though they constitute 14.5% of the population. However, I recognise that despite these statistics older and vulnerable people still have very real concerns about crime. My Department has taken a number of actions which will support the work of the wider justice agencies and Government in tackling crimes against older and vulnerable people and addressing the fear of crime.

They include the development of a comprehensive Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending. The framework aims to fundamentally reshape our approach to tackling the factors leading people into the criminal justice system and the obstacles which hinder them from getting back out of it. This is a broad project, with far-reaching links across a number of Executive Departments. The target for the publication of the draft framework is April 2012.

A new Community Safety Strategy, which will be published in the coming months, will include proposals which build on existing successful initiatives at regional and local level such as community safety wardens, intergenerational projects and Neighbourhood Watch schemes to address fear of crime and provide reassurance to the most vulnerable.

The introduction at a local level of the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships will be central to the delivery of local actions to support older and vulnerable people.

In addition, the Lord Chief Justice has recently announced a priority list of areas where sentencing guidance for the judiciary will be developed. The principles underlying sentencing, expressed in this guidance, will include attacks on the vulnerable, including older people, as an aggravating factor in sentencing decisions. Alongside this work I have been considering a range of potential mechanisms by which greater transparency, consistency and understanding of sentencing practice might be achieved. I hope to announce proposals in the near future on how best these might be delivered in a way that will promote public confidence.

## Legal Aid: Planning Decisions

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice in how many cases was legal aid granted to a party undertaking a judicial review on a planning decision by the Department of the Environment, in each of the last five years; and what is the cost of each case to date. (AQW 9138/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission has identified four cases where legal aid has been granted for judicial review of planning decisions by the Department of Environment in the last five years. Payment has been made in three of the four cases as follows:

| Financial Year    | Total Paid    |
|-------------------|---------------|
| 2009-2010         | £1,200        |
| 2011-2012         | £2,514        |
| 2011-2012         | £4,312        |
| <b>Total Paid</b> | <b>£8,026</b> |

## Prisoners: Day Release Offences

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners, including those in young offenders and juvenile justice facilities, have been charged with committing a criminal offence whilst on day release in each of the last twelve months, broken down by facility. (AQW 9145/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** Information in the form requested is not readily available for prisoners or young offenders within the Prison Service and could only be obtained/compiled at disproportionate cost.

In relation to Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, there is no information that can be provided due to current court reporting restrictions.

## Sexual Offences: Anonymity before Trial

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Justice why anonymity before a trial is not granted to people accused of sexual offences, as is the case in England. (AQW 9146/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** In its programme for government published in May 2010, the UK Government announced its intention to extend anonymity in rape cases to defendants in England and Wales. However, in November 2010, following publication of a report

of an independent assessment of relevant research, the Government announced that it was dropping its plans as there was insufficient empirical evidence to support the introduction of defendant anonymity.

I have no plans to introduce defendant anonymity in such cases.

### **Prison Service: Disciplinary Investigations**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether the Prison Service has accumulated a bank of experienced investigators to use in disciplinary hearings, as was recommended in the 2009 Pearson Review Team Report.

**(AQW 9151/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Northern Ireland Prison Service has a pool of experienced investigators to draw from for disciplinary investigations. The Prison Service is currently setting up a new Professional Standards Unit which will further improve the disciplinary process.

### **Prison Officers: Voluntary Staff Exit Scheme**

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many prison officers have applied the Voluntary Staff Exit Scheme; (ii) how many of these prison officers will depart under the scheme; (iii) when those prison officers will leave their posts; (iv) how and when the prison officers who applied for the Scheme were informed of the timescale for their departure or otherwise; and (v) to which tax and National Insurance liabilities these prison officers will be subject.

**(AQW 9163/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** 544 members of the Northern Ireland Prison Service applied for the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme (VER). 224 applications have so far been approved of which 151 will leave on 31 March 2012. The departure of 73 individuals has been delayed for operational reasons. The remaining 320 of the applications received remain under consideration.

In accordance with the VER launch documentation which issued on 8 November 2011, NIPS wrote to all staff who applied for the exit scheme on 1 March 2012 informing them that the Voluntary Early Retirement Panel had met, and advising them of the panel's decision.

Those leaving the Northern Ireland Prison Service under the terms of the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme must be taxed in accordance with the rules of H M Revenue and Customs. Consequently, any member of staff with a leaving date of 31 March 2012 will be taxed in the 2011/12 tax year.

Staff under state pension age will pay National Insurance Contributions in the 2011/12 tax year.

### **HMP Maghaberry: Fire**

**Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the details and circumstances of the fire in a prison cell at Maghaberry Prison on 29 February 2012.

**(AQW 9164/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** On 29 February 2012 at approximately 20.30 hours a prisoner set fire to his prison cell in the Care and Supervision Unit at Maghaberry Prison. As a precautionary measure, six prisoners were taken to an outside exercise yard and held there for a short period of time until the building was declared safe by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. No prisoners were injured. One officer was taken to hospital with smoke inhalation but was discharged soon after. The damage sustained to prison property was minimal and was quickly cleaned and returned to service.

### **Judiciary: Complaints Procedure**

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the procedure for making a complaint about remarks made by members of the Judiciary to defendants and witnesses during court cases and in court judgements.

**(AQW 9172/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Lord Chief Justice has statutory responsibility for determining complaints about the conduct of judicial office holders. The procedure is prescribed in the Lord Chief Justice's Code of Practice on Complaints. Hard copies are available on request, alternatively this can be viewed on the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service website:-

(<http://www.courtsni.gov.uk/en-GB/AboutUs/MakingAComplaint/ComplaintAboutJudicialOfficeHolder/Pages/default.aspx>)

### **Disciplinary Action: DOJ Staff**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of staff disciplinary actions taken by his Department in each of the last two years, at Staff Officer level and above, including details of the offence and the disciplinary sanctions applied.

**(AQW 9187/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Due to the low number of staff within the DOJ at Staff Officer level and above who have had disciplinary sanctions applied, the information requested will not be released. This is to protect the identity of the individuals concerned as disclosure would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

### **Courthouse Closures: Impact on Travelling Times**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the impact on travelling arrangements under the proposed closure of court houses, given that the Minister for Regional Development has stated that he has no powers to support a transport service dedicated solely to people using the courts.

**(AQW 9194/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Hearing Centre consultation exercise invited views on the impact that the proposed closures would have on court users. The availability and cost of public transport has been raised both in written responses and at public meetings. I wish to consider all of the matters raised by consultees, including an assessment of the impact of the proposals on travel arrangements, before making a decision.

### **Institutional Abuse: Convictions**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been convicted of institutional abuse in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 9195/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** There is no definition of institutional abuse in law and no mechanism to register offences under the category of institutional abuse. Court conviction datasets therefore do not allow for the identification of these offences.

### **Courts Estate**

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Justice what is the expected timeline for the assessment of the Courts Estate, now that the consultation process has ended.

**(AQW 9222/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** I plan to publish a consultee response document on the Hearing Centre Consultation by the end of June 2012.

### **Bench Warrant/Arrest Warrant: Confusion**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether, in order to avoid confusion, particularly in statistical collation, he will dispense with the terms of Bench Warrant and Arrest Warrant and introduce one title to be used by all courts.

**(AQW 9258/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** It is customary to refer to warrants issued in the Crown Court as 'Bench Warrants', and to refer to warrants issued in the Magistrates' Courts and in the County Court as 'Arrest Warrants'. I do not have any plans to alter this practice. However, where appropriate, and in the interests of clarity, I will arrange for the different categories of warrant to be shown as a composite statistics in answers to Assembly Questions.

### **Thomas Ward: Sex Offender Treatment Programme**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether Thomas Ward engaged in any Sex Offender Treatment Programmes whilst in custody for his previous offence.

**(AQW 9259/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The information requested constitutes sensitive personal data as defined at section 2 of the Data Protection Act 1998. The disclosure of such information is likely to breach the data subject's rights under the Act and would be incompatible with the Data Protection Principles. The information cannot therefore be provided as requested.

### **Prison Officers: Criminal Offences**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7767/11-15, AQW 7685-11-15 and AQW 8494/11-15, for his assessment of the answers in relation to the findings contained in the 2009 Pearson Review Team Report which state that the Prison Service needs a fair, swift and certain disciplinary system with zero tolerance for criminal offences of any kind.

**(AQW 9260/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Prison Service is currently reviewing its existing disciplinary system. As part of that process it will consider the options available in terms of disciplining staff convicted of committing criminal offences.

### **Bangor Taxi Marshal Scheme: Funding**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Justice what funding is available for the continuance of the Bangor Taxi Marshall Scheme; and whether this funding can be drawn down by Police and Community Safety Partnerships to ensure that there is no gap in funding from 31 March 2012.

**(AQW 9279/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Bangor Taxi Marshall Scheme is currently funded through the North Down Community Safety Partnership and is an initiative delivered through funding provided by my Department for Community Safety Wardens.

My Department has already written to North Down Borough Council to advise that funding for Community Safety Wardens will be made available for 2012/2013 financial year. It will be a matter for the Council, in conjunction with the Policing and Community Safety Partnership which will be established from 1 April 2012, if they wish to continue funding for the Taxi Marshall Scheme.

### **Prison Service: Employment Contracts**

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the contracts of employment given to the (i) Director General; and (ii) Change Manager when they were appointed to the Northern Ireland Prison Service.  
**(AQW 9291/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Colin McConnell was appointed as Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service from 4 January 2011, on secondment from the National Offender Management Service.

Colin Bennett was employed by the Strategic Investment Board on a fixed term contract for 3 years and seconded to the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

### **Driving without Insurance**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8663/11-15, and given the confirmation that aiding and abetting crime is a criminal offence, whether this matter will now be reported to the PSNI with a view to prosecution.  
**(AQW 9330/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Northern Ireland Prison Service did not and does not consider that there was evidence of a criminal offence having been committed by staff, and concludes that the matter was appropriately dealt with under the internal discipline procedures.

### **Gerry McGeough: Legal Aid Costs**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how much has been paid to date in legal aid for the defence of, and the actions taken by, Gerry McGeough; and for an estimate of the final total figure.  
**(AQW 9334/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** All claims have been received and paid in respect of representation at the Magistrates' Court. The total amount paid was £7,996.98 (excluding VAT of £1,399.47) to Mr McGeough's solicitor and £1,704.25 (excluding VAT of £298.24) to counsel.

Fees have also been paid to Mr McGeough's solicitor for three High Court Bail applications amounting to £2,191.33 (excluding VAT of £383.49).

To date claims for advice provided under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) amount to £1,775.03 (excluding VAT of £310.63 and disbursements of £102.82).

Claims received and paid for representation at the Crown Court amount to £130,000 (excluding VAT of £26,000 and disbursements of £6,851.67) to Mr McGeough's solicitor and a total of £35,000.00 (excluding VAT of £7,000.00), has been paid to counsel.

Fees in respect of advice and assistance in relation to a Court of Appeal application amounting to £363.77 (excluding VAT of £72.75 and disbursements of £419.64) have been paid.

Civil legal aid fees have also been paid, in respect of a judicial review, amounting to £1880.92 (excluding VAT of £329.05 and disbursements of £660.65) to Mr McGeough's solicitor and £1539.00 has been paid to counsel.

No additional bills are expected.

### **Human Trafficking: Convictions**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions for human trafficking have been secured in each of the last three years.  
**(AQW 9401/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Human trafficking offences may be prosecuted under the relevant sexual exploitation offence in Sections 57(1)(a), 57(1)(b), 58(1) and 59(1) of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Paying for the sexual services of a prostitute subjected to force may be prosecuted under Section 53(a) of the same act.

Data for the calendar years 2007 to 2010 (the last year for which data are available) record one conviction in 2008 for the offence of 'Trafficking within the UK for the purposes of sexual exploitation (by another)'.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

### **Probation Hostels: Belfast**

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total number of probation hostels in (i) North; (ii) South; (iii) East; and (iv) West, Belfast.  
**(AQW 9465/11-15)**



**Mr Ford:** There are no probation hostels in Northern Ireland. The Probation Board for Northern Ireland works in close partnership with a range of voluntary and community organisations, and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive through Supporting People, to offer accommodation to offenders.

There are four approved premises in Belfast;

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>North Belfast:</b> | <b>There are two hostels in North Belfast, one of which is temporarily closed for refurbishment.</b> |
| South Belfast:        | There are two hostels in South Belfast.  |
| East Belfast:         | None.  |
| West Belfast:         | None.  |

### **Ballymoney Police Station: Closure**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the rationale behind the decision to close the existing Ballymoney Police Station and build a new station on a new site.

**(AQW 9468/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The management of the police estate is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

### **Royal Ulster Constabulary Athletic Association: Name Change**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice what role his Department has in promoting the change in the name of the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Athletic Association.

**(AQW 9490/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** My Department has no role in promoting a change in the name of the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Athletic Association.

### **Royal Ulster Constabulary Athletic Association: Funding**

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Justice what funding his Department provides to the PSNI for the Royal Ulster Constabulary Athletic Association; and whether he intends to withdraw any funding should the Association not change its name.

**(AQW 9503/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) – and not the Department of Justice – funds the Royal Ulster Constabulary Athletic Association (RUCAA). The role of my Department has been to approve PSNI's requests to make payment, as the amounts are in excess of PSNI's delegated expenditure limits.

Whilst it is entirely a matter for the members of the RUCAA to determine what name the association is known by, I would support a change to the Police Athletic Association which would reflect the membership of the Association in an inclusive way.

## **Department for Regional Development**

### **Terrorist Organisations: Illegal Commemorations**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how many terrorist commemorations to (i) Republicans; and (ii) Loyalists exist on property owned by his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, broken down by council area.

**(AQW 2507/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):** I wish to apologise to the Member for the delay in answering this question. My Department does not maintain details of the terrorist organisations associated with illegal commemorations on property owned by it, or its arm's length bodies.

However, my Department's officials have advised of 34 such commemorations and I can confirm that 18 are located in the Newry and Mourne council area, 7 in the Fermanagh council area, 2 in the Limavady council area and 1 in each in the Armagh, Cookstown, Dungannon, Magherafelt, Omagh, Strabane and Derry City council areas.

### **Clonoe Martyrs Commemoration: Removal of Republican Banners and Posters**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is being taken to remove the republican banners and posters, advertising a Clonoe Martyrs commemoration, from departmental property in Counties Tyrone and Armagh.

**(AQW 7765/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has investigated this matter. Advice has been sought from the PSNI and further liaison will continue. The safety of Roads Service staff at all times will be paramount.

### **Buses: Bicycle Racks**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he would consider following the example set by the transportation authorities in Victoria, Canada and Maine, USA in providing funding to install bicycle racks onto buses, to encourage cycling and to facilitate a more integrated transportation network.

**(AQW 8250/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department is committed to encouraging cycling as outlined in the ongoing consultation on 'Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland'. This draft strategy sets out the framework to help people choose more sustainable and active travel modes. A key aim is to encourage cycling and links to public transport as part of a more integrated transportation network. Capital funding for measures to encourage active travel is available under the active travel demonstration projects. This includes the potential of funding for cycle stands.

Translink has previously given consideration to the fitting of cycle racks to buses. However, the company decided not to do so because of a number of safety concerns.

The company's main safety issue with rear fitting racks is that they are fitted in a blind spot for the driver. It is also their view that the size and height of most front fitting cycle racks would obscure a substantial part of the driver's field of vision. Most service buses in Northern Ireland have deep front windscreens. Typical buses in North America have smaller windscreens where a cycle rack would not impinge on the driver's sight lines.

### **NI Water: Bonus Payments**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm that, as part of the post-tender award of NIW contract C071, bonus payments of a minimum of £1500 per year were to be made available for embedded contract staff who achieved high standards, under the performance management system.

**(AQW 8814/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it does not recognise the term 'embedded contract staff'. Employees of contractors engaged by NIW under tendered contract arrangements are not deemed NIW employees. As such, their contractual terms are a matter between themselves and the employing organisation.

As part of performance management arrangements included in the contract, the contractor engaged by NIW under tender C071 initially agreed to pay a collective annual bonus of a minimum of £1,500. However, following an internal review of this process, it was identified that NIW may be required to become engaged with an element of the performance management process. Given that the contract staff were not employees of NIW it was consequently agreed with the contractor that it would not be possible to implement the performance management arrangements.

### **NI Water: Embedded Contract Staff**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm if the Head of the Mechanical and Electrical function within NI Water met with elected representatives of the embedded contract staff, engaged under NI Water tender C071, on the 27 January 2012; (ii) to detail the reasons for this meeting; (iii) who requested the meeting; (iv) the outcome of the meeting; and (v) whether the CEO of NI Water was aware of it.

**(AQW 8815/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it does not recognise the term "embedded contract staff". Employees of contractors engaged by NIW under a tendered contract arrangement are not deemed NIW employees. NIW has confirmed that (i) its Head of Mechanical and Electrical Services did meet with some contractor employees on 27 January 2012, but they were not acting in the capacity of "elected representatives" for contract staff. (ii) The meeting was to discuss issues raised by the contractor employees about the Transfer of Undertakings and Protection of Employment (TUPE) transfer of contractor employees as a result of the award of a new technical support contract C527. (iii) The meeting was requested by a contractor employee. (iv) The Head of Mechanical and Electrical Services acknowledged the points raised by the contractor employees but advised that the TUPE transfer was a matter for the contractor not NIW. (v) The Chief Executive was not aware of this routine meeting with contractor employees.

### **Unadopted Roads: Ballymena/Ballymoney/Moyle**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development what roads in the (i) Ballymena; (ii) Ballymoney; and (ii) Moyle council areas have not been adopted; and which of these has an outstanding road bond.

**(AQW 9002/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that:-

- (i) Roads not yet adopted by Roads Service in Ballymena District Council Area:
  - Bonded Sites – Not Adopted
  - Brooklands, Ahoghill

- Maine Grove, Cullybackey
- Grange Cottages, Toomebridge
- Old Galgorm Manor, Ballymena
- Millwater Lodge, Ahoghill
- Carndale Meadows, Ballymena
- Three Trees Manor, Broughshane
- Craignamaddy Heights, Cargan
- Tullymore Gardens, Broughshane
- Crebilly Road, Ballymena
- Belgrano, Ahoghill
- Millwater Court, Ahoghill
- Sandhurst Manor, Galgorm
- Woodside Road, Ballymena
- Adj to Carndale Meadows, Ballymena
- Glenleslie Road, Clough
- Main Street, Portglenone
- Fisherstown, Cargan
- Ravel Manor, Cargan
- Parkmore Drive, Ballymena
- Meeting House Meadows, Ahoghill
- Phoenix Fields, Ballymena
- Caherty Road, Broughshane
- Westbourne Avenue, Ballymena
- Galgorm Road, Ahoghill
- Riverdale Park, Portglenone
- Wellington Crescent, Ballymena
- Grange View, Toomebridge
- Ardnagreena, Ballymena
- Taylorstown Hill, Toome
- Rectory Gardens, Broughshane
- Clarence Street, Ballymena
- Leighinmohr Avenue, Ballymena
- Garvaghy Crescent, Portglenone
- Glenravel Road, Martinstown
- Parkgate Road, Kells
- Cushendall Road, Ballymena
- Old Antrim Mews, Ballymena
- Brookfield Gardens, Ahoghill

**Unbonded Sites - Not Adopted**

- Cushendall Road, Ballymena
- (ii) Roads not yet adopted by Roads Service in Ballymoney District Council Area:
- Bonded Sites – Not Adopted
  - Greengage Lane, Ballymoney
  - Ashlea, Ballymoney
  - Drumnamallaght Park, Ballymoney
  - Bannfields, Ballymoney
  - Mill Cottages, Stranocum
  - Shelton Meadows, Loughguile
  - Knockeden Avenue, Ballymoney
  - The Birches, Rasharkin
  - Tullyview, Loughguile
  - Springhill Manor, Cloughmills

- Jubilee Court, Ballymoney
- Carrowdoon Park, Dunloy
- Edenmore, Ballymoney
- Castlecatt Road, Dervock
- Millbrooke Manor, Ballymoney
- Churchfields, Rasharkin
- Stroan Road, Dervock
- Cairnhill, Dunloy
- Millbrooke Manor, Ballymoney
- Off Bann Road, Ballymoney
- Milltown Avenue, Ballymoney

(iii) Roads not yet adopted by Roads Service in Moyle District Council Area:

- Bonded Sites – Not Adopted
- Caman Drive, Ballycastle (Stage 1)
- Caman Close, Ballycastle (Stage 2)
- Caman Gardens, Ballycastle (Stage 3)
- Off Leyland Road, Ballycastle (Stage 1)
- Off Leyland Road, Ballycastle (Stage 2)
- Off Leyland Road Ballycastle (Stage 3)
- Off Leyland Road Ballycastle (Stage 4)
- Off Leyland Road Ballycastle (Stage 5)
- Off Main Street Mosside (Stage 1)
- Off Main Street Mosside (Stage 1)
- Off Hillside Road Ballycastle (Stage 1)
- Clare Court Ballycastle (Stage 1)
- Clare Court Ballycastle (Stage 2)
- Knockmore Road Mosside (Stage 1)
- Off Whitepark Road Ballycastle (Stage 1)
- Off Leyland Road Ballycastle (Stage 1)
- Richies Wood, Bushmills (Stage 1)
- Richies Wood Bushmills (Stage 2)
- Park Manor Ballycastle (Stage 1)
- Off Priestland/Craigaboney Road Bushmills (Stage 2)
- Off Priestland/Craigaboney Road Bushmills (Stage 3)
- Cregagh View Knocknacarry (Stage 1)
- Off Craigaboney/Priestland Road Bushmills (Stage 1)
- Clare Court Ballycastle (Stage 1)
- Caman Gardens Ballycastle (Stage 1)
- 22/26 Castle Street Ballycastle (Stage 1)
- 22/26 Castle Street Ballycastle (Stage 2)
- Off Leyland Road Ballycastle (Stage 1)

**Unbonded Sites - Not Adopted**

- Mill Farm Mosside (Stage 1)
- Mill Farm Mosside (Stage 2)
- Riversdale Mosside (Stage 1)
- Castlecatt Road Bushmills (Stage 1)
- Toberdoney Road Liscolman (Stage 1)

### Translink: Purchase of Gatwick Trains

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 8109/11-15 and AQW 8102/11-15, for his assessment of the situation where the detail of the amount of public funds spent on the acquisition of the Gatwick trains, and the associated work, is not available to the public; and what steps he will take to ensure that there is transparency on this issue. **(AQW 9021/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** In answer to AQW 8109/11-15 and AQW 8102/11-15, I informed the Member that the information requested for specific costs relate to contracts Translink has entered into with other commercial organisations which are bound by confidentiality. The contracts involved were competitively tendered in line with EU procurement rules.

While this remains the case in relation to the detailed costs, in the interest of transparency, I can advise you that my Department provided overall funding of approximately £1.5 million for the original purchase and conversion of the Gatwick trains in 2001 and the subsequent purchase and conversion of the Driver Van Trailer referred to previously in AQW 8109/11-15.

### AQW 2507/11-15

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain the delay in answering AQW 2507/11-15; and when he will provide the answer.

**(AQW 9025/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 2507/11-15.

### Roads: Cost of Planning and Design

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost in professional fees for the planning and design of roads which have not yet been constructed, in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 9040/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** Details of the expenditure on professional fees for the planning and design of roads, which have not yet been constructed, in each of the last ten years, are provided in the table below:

| Year    | Spend On Professional Fees For The Planning And Design Of Roads Not Yet Constructed |
|---------|---|
| 2002/03 | £0  |
| 2003/04 | £85,000   |
| 2004/05 | £383,000  |
| 2005/06 | £1,405,000  |
| 2006/07 | £4,345,000  |
| 2007/08 | £7,725,000  |
| 2008/09 | £17,445,000   |
| 2009/10 | £20,750,000   |
| 2010/11 | £13,806,000   |
| 2011/12 | £10,824,000 (to the end of January)   |

It should be noted that a major road scheme typically takes six to seven years of development from inception to construction.

The marked increase in expenditure in recent years reflects the significant increase in investment in our roads infrastructure envisaged. Expenditure from 2008/09 onwards reflects the significant work to bring forward the A5 and A8 schemes, which are now confirmed to proceed to construction, and other schemes, such as the A6 (Londonderry to Dungiven and Randalstown to Castledawson), which are planned for construction in the draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (2011/21) period.

### Roads: North Down

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the road schemes that are planned to be carried out in the North Down constituency in 2012/13.

**(AQW 9051/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** The detailed budget for the 2012/13 financial year has not yet been finalised and it is, therefore, not possible to provide details of future works programmes at this time.

I would remind the Member that, when works programmes are finalised, information on proposed roads schemes for each financial year can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

[http://www.drni.gov.uk/index/freedom\\_of\\_information/customer\\_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils](http://www.drni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils)

### Road Bonds: Inactive Sites

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the total value of Road Bonds that are being held; (ii) who is liable for the bonds on inactive sites; and (iii) to detail the present owner of each inactive site.

**(AQW 9087/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the total value of Road Bonds currently held is £112.5 million.

With regard to liability for the bonds on inactive sites, I am further advised that Road Bonds are held by the surety for the developer, but control of an inactive site would lie with the "responsible person" as defined in the Private Streets Order 1980. Depending on the state of progress on a particular site, the site could be under the control of the developer, an administrator or in the case of an Article 11 Notice having been served, the Department.

With regard to the present owner of each inactive site, this information is not readily available, as Roads Service may only be aware of the developer's name or who holds a bond, neither of whom may be the present owner.

### A5: Costs

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 8320/11-15, what certainty attaches to the £330 million quoted as the cost involved, if there are no contract prices agreed for the two announced sections of the A5.

**(AQW 9090/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I can advise the Member that £330 million is the estimated cost of the A5 scheme being taken through to construction later this year. As with the majority of construction projects, the actual cost will not be apparent until the scheme is completed and accounts settled. The estimated cost has been compiled in accordance with best practice methods using the expertise of our scheme designers, cost consultants and the contractor who will carry out the works.

### A5: Funding Package

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 8321/11-15, how much of the £330 million is allocated for (i) land acquisition; (ii) design; (iii) construction; and (iv) other outlay, in each section.

**(AQW 9091/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I should explain that the £330 million funding package agreed by the Executive is allocated on a total scheme basis.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that the current best estimates on allocations for the two sections of the A5 scheme are detailed in the table below.

#### Breakdown of allocations for land acquisition, design, construction and other costs for the two sections of the A5 Scheme

|                         | Section 1 - £m | Section 2 - £m | Total - £m |
|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------|
| Land (including blight) | 32             | 20             | 52         |
| Design                  | 10             | 15             | 25         |
| Construction            | 115            | 110            | 225        |
| Other Costs             | 13             | 15             | 28         |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>170</b>     | <b>160</b>     | <b>330</b> |

### Asbestos: Omagh Water Network

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail the length of the asbestos pipes in the water network in the Omagh area; (ii) for his assessment of any associated health risks; and (iii) whether he has any plans to replace the asbestos pipes.

**(AQW 9095/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that (i) there are 81.5 kilometres of asbestos cement pipes providing drinking water in the Omagh area, representing around 5% of all water mains in the area.

- (ii) NIW is satisfied that there are no associated health risks with the use of asbestos cement pipes to supply drinking water. The World Health Organisation has undertaken a number of studies on the subject and concluded that, while inhaled asbestos is a known health risk, there is no consistent or convincing evidence that ingested asbestos is hazardous

to health. The health concerns regarding asbestos cement pipes are related to occupational exposure during their manufacture, installation and disposal and these are covered by industry regulations. Any work undertaken by NIW staff on asbestos cement pipes is in accordance with legislative requirements and associated Health and Safety guidance.

- (iii) As the use of asbestos cement pipes for the supply of drinking water is not a health concern, there is no specific programme to replace them. Asbestos cement water mains will therefore be replaced progressively as part of NIW's ongoing Water Mains Rehabilitation Programme. Decisions on mains replacement are taken on the basis of normal serviceability criteria such as water quality, the number of burst mains per kilometre, low water pressure or the number of interruptions to the supply to customers.

### **Penalty Charge Notices: Observation Period**

**Mr Dunne** asked the Minister for Regional Development how long is the observation period for a traffic attendant to ascertain if loading or unloading is taking place before a Penalty Charge Notice can be issued.

**(AQW 9114/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that at locations where parking restrictions apply and loading and unloading is also permitted, a Traffic Attendant will observe a vehicle for five minutes to establish if loading or unloading is taking place, before issuing a Penalty Charge Notice. However, for goods vehicles, the observation period is extended to 10 minutes.

### **Portavoe Reservoir: Disposal**

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Regional Development when NI Water will dispose of Portavoe Reservoir; and what method of disposal will be used.

**(AQW 9152/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it no longer has any strategic interest in Portavoe Reservoir and has declared the property surplus to requirements. NIW is currently researching a number of issues relating to the disposal of the reservoir and no decision on the method of disposal will be taken until this is completed.

### **Roads: Humps**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the criteria that is used to determine whether an area will have road humps installed.

**(AQW 9165/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the criteria used to determine whether an area will have road humps installed are:

- collision history;
- traffic speed and volume; and
- local environmental considerations in terms of the presence of shops, public buildings, schools, hospitals, etc. These give an indication of the likely vulnerable road user movements and therefore the risk of road collisions.

The policy also recognises that different types of traffic calming features are appropriate at different locations and this is reflected in the assessment. However, the implementation of traffic calming measures in any area will also be dependent on the availability of resources.

### **Kerbstones: Castle Avenue, Belfast**

**Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister for Regional Development why the granite kerbstones in Castle Avenue, Belfast were removed and replaced with concrete kerbstones.

**(AQW 9167/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that when assessing Castle Avenue for inclusion in a resurfacing programme, it found the existing kerblines to be a mix of concrete and granite kerbstones. Many of the existing granite kerbstones were weathered and unusable once removed and would have required extensive redressing before reuse. To have replaced the existing kerbstones with granite kerbs would have added significantly to the costs of the scheme and jeopardised its delivery in this financial year. Therefore, Roads Service decided to replace all kerbstones with new concrete kerbstones. Any reusable granite kerbstones have been added to our stockpile for use in appropriate areas in the North Belfast area.

### **Kerbstones: Castle Avenue, Belfast**

**Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister for Regional Development to where the granite kerbstones that were removed from Castle Avenue, Belfast, were relocated.

**(AQW 9168/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the reusable granite kerbstones removed from Castle Avenue are being stored in its depot at Corporation Street and are available for use, where required, at other appropriate locations in North Belfast.

**Kerbstones: Castle Avenue, Belfast**

**Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister for Regional Development what was the total cost of replacing the granite kerbstones with concrete kerbstones in Castle Avenue, Belfast.

**(AQW 9169/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the cost for removing and replacing all kerbstones in Castle Avenue was approximately £4,700.

**Kerbstones: Castle Avenue, Belfast**

**Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister for Regional Development how the removal of the granite kerbstones, from Castle Avenue, Belfast, is consistent with the preservation and protection of the built heritage of such an area.

**(AQW 9170/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** While I appreciate that in some areas residents have an affinity to the old granite kerbs, my Department's Roads Service has advised that it is not always possible for engineering and economic reasons to use them when carrying out refurbishment work.

In the case of Castle Avenue, to replace the existing granite kerbstones and precast concrete kerbs with granite kerbs would have added significantly to the costs of the scheme and jeopardised its delivery in this financial year.

Although I appreciate the views of local residents, it is not always possible to retain the use of old granite kerbing when carrying out footway refurbishment. In this regard, Roads Service concentrates its effort on retaining granite kerbing on main arterial routes or in Conservation Areas. I am advised that Castle Avenue does not fall into either of these categories.

**Penalty Charge Notices: Daily Quotas**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what action he is taking to ensure that NSL is not setting its wardens minimum daily ticket quotas, as was the case in the Kensington and Chelsea Council area; (ii) whether he has raised this issue with NSL; and (iii) how many complaints have been made to his Department regarding such a policy since NSL was awarded the contract.

**(AQW 9198/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that while Traffic Attendants are expected to issue Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) to vehicles that are illegally parked, my Department's contract with NSL does not stipulate 'ticket quotas'. Therefore, no payments are made to NSL or to individual Traffic Attendants based on the number of PCNs issued. Indeed, NSL has recently restated that ticket quotas are not used in Northern Ireland.

I would like to assure you that all aspects of the operation of the parking enforcement contract in Northern Ireland are subject to ongoing oversight and management by Roads Service officials. Roads Service receives and processes considerable volumes of correspondence about PCNs and parking enforcement on a daily basis. Officials respond to enquiries, complaints, or allegations concerning 'ticket quotas' by referring to the terms of the Roads Service contract with NSL.

As I am sure the Member will appreciate, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any NSL contracts or operations in London Boroughs or Local Authority areas elsewhere.

**Roads: Gritting List**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the roads in the North Down area which are used by no more than 1500 vehicles per day and are currently on the gritting list.

**(AQW 9201/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service salts seven designated routes from the Balloo Depot in Bangor, covering the Council areas of North Down, Ards and parts of Castlereagh and Belfast. These routes were established a number of years ago but it is considered that Rhanbuoy Road and Rhanbuoy Park, Craigavad and Ballymenoch Road, Hollywood may have traffic volumes less than 1500 vehicles per day. These roads, which equate to approximately 1% of the salted network in North Down, will be re-assessed before the commencement of the 2012/13 winter service season.

**Reservoirs: Disposal Strategy**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposals to dispose of reservoirs.

**(AQW 9281/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has a number of reservoirs which are surplus to requirements and it proposes to dispose of them over the next number of years. Disposal of the reservoirs will be in accordance with NIW's disposal strategy which may entail placing them on the open market. Any sale would be dependent on a number of factors, not least the market at the time and any expression of interest. In disposing of surplus lands NIW must ensure it gets the best price for the property, achieves value for money and high standards of propriety.



## Hospital Appointments: Community Transport

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action has been taken to reverse the decision to not allow people in rural areas to use community transport for attendance at hospital appointments.

**(AQW 9282/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** There has been no change to my Departments approach to funding services under the Rural Transport Fund (RTF) and provided by Rural Community Transport Partnerships. Each partnership provides services based on a specific geographical area in line with the aims of the RTF to facilitate transport in rural areas. It is important to point out that vehicles available to the partnerships have to be available to within that geographic area to facilitate all user needs as far as possible.

Under the 'Dial a Lift' scheme the Partnerships have always been able to provide transport to local GP surgeries, dentists and local clinics. My Department agreed with the Partnerships in 2010 that they may provide transport to local hospitals for members who do not qualify for DHSSPS assistance with travel. This position remains unchanged.

This service should not be seen as a substitute for health funded transport, which is the statutory responsibility of the DHSSPS under the auspices of the Patient Care Service. The Patient Care Service (a tier of the NI Ambulance Service) provides non-emergency patient transport services across Northern Ireland.

I recognise the need for my department to interact with the DHSSPS on these important issues. A process has started at official level and it is hoped this will allow these issues to be progressed within statutory and budgetary constraints.

## Railways: Passenger Journeys

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of suburban railway passenger journeys on the (i) Portadown; (ii) Bangor; (iii) Larne; (iv) Londonderry; and (v) Portrush lines in each of the last five financial years.

**(AQW 9344/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** The table below details the number of passenger journeys on the requested lines in each of the last five financial years:

|             | 2006/07<br>'000 | 2007/08<br>'000 | 2008/09<br>'000 | 2009/10<br>'000 | 2010/11<br>'000 |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Bangor      | 1,957           | 2,064           | 2,237           | 2,323           | 2,410           |
| Portadown   | 2,505           | 3,009           | 3,201           | 3,051           | 3,078           |
| Larne       | 1,720           | 1,905           | 2,076           | 2,085           | 2,111           |
| Londonderry | 1,021           | 1,175           | 1,402           | 1,311           | 1,477           |
| Portrush    | 518             | 466             | 489             | 483             | 529             |

Note: the figures are supplied by Translink but are not official statistics.

## Department for Social Development

### Civil Service: Posts

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 7857/11-15, (i) why information on departmental staff positions is not held by council area; and (ii) in what geographical format his Department can provide the information.

**(AQW 8735/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):** The system on which my department holds staffing information does not require data to be recorded by council area and so my department does not have a ready means to collect and report data in the form requested.

My department can provide information on the deployment of staff-in-post based on address information. The same information cannot be provided with the same degree of precision for the distribution of Civil Service posts in my department which is what was requested in AQW 7857/11-15 because that figure will include posts which at that point in time are vacant and for which no address information can be held.

I have provided in the tables below information on the distribution of staff in the grades requested in AQW 7857/11-15, across the Department's office network. Table 1 provides headcount figures, while Table 2 provides full-time equivalent figures by office location.

**Table 1 – Headcount**

| Location | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | DP | SO | EO1 | EO2 | A0 | AA |
|----------|---------|---------|----|----|-----|-----|----|----|
| Antrim   | 0       | 1       | 1  | 3  | 5   | 19  | 27 | 10 |

| Location      | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | DP  | S0  | E01 | E02  | A0   | AA  |
|---------------|---------|---------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-----|
| Armagh        | 0       | 0       | 0   | 1   | 4   | 27   | 43   | 13  |
| Ballymena     | 0       | 1       | 4   | 3   | 7   | 17   | 28   | 4   |
| Ballymoney    | 0       | 0       | 0   | 1   | 2   | 9    | 6    | 0   |
| Ballynahinch  | 0       | 0       | 0   | 0   | 1   | 7    | 12   | 2   |
| Banbridge     | 0       | 1       | 1   | 6   | 6   | 14   | 17   | 3   |
| Bangor        | 0       | 0       | 0   | 1   | 2   | 19   | 23   | 3   |
| Belfast       | 10      | 67      | 164 | 313 | 466 | 1289 | 2502 | 353 |
| Carrickfergus | 0       | 0       | 0   | 1   | 1   | 8    | 16   | 2   |
| Coleraine     | 0       | 1       | 2   | 4   | 13  | 22   | 39   | 9   |
| Cookstown     | 0       | 0       | 0   | 0   | 0   | 4    | 9    | 0   |
| Londonderry   | 0       | 2       | 10  | 25  | 40  | 198  | 388  | 81  |
| Downpatrick   | 0       | 0       | 0   | 1   | 2   | 16   | 17   | 4   |
| Dungannon     | 0       | 1       | 1   | 3   | 5   | 19   | 33   | 6   |
| Enniskillen   | 0       | 0       | 0   | 2   | 2   | 19   | 25   | 7   |
| Kilkeel       | 0       | 0       | 0   | 0   | 1   | 4    | 7    | 3   |
| Larne         | 0       | 0       | 0   | 1   | 2   | 8    | 16   | 5   |
| Limavady      | 0       | 0       | 0   | 0   | 1   | 3    | 8    | 0   |
| Lisburn       | 0       | 0       | 0   | 1   | 1   | 19   | 32   | 10  |
| Lurgan        | 0       | 0       | 0   | 1   | 2   | 15   | 27   | 6   |
| Magherafelt   | 0       | 0       | 0   | 1   | 4   | 26   | 42   | 6   |
| Newcastle     | 0       | 0       | 0   | 1   | 1   | 8    | 14   | 3   |
| Newry         | 0       | 1       | 1   | 1   | 4   | 20   | 35   | 10  |
| Newtownards   | 0       | 0       | 0   | 0   | 2   | 19   | 20   | 4   |
| Omagh         | 0       | 0       | 0   | 3   | 7   | 31   | 38   | 3   |
| Portadown     | 0       | 1       | 1   | 2   | 7   | 12   | 28   | 5   |
| Strabane      | 0       | 0       | 0   | 1   | 3   | 17   | 22   | 3   |

**Table 2 – Full-time Equivalent**

| Location      | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | DP     | S0     | E01    | E02     | A0      | AA     |
|---------------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|--------|
| Antrim        | 0       | 1.00    | 1.00   | 2.80   | 4.60   | 16.59   | 23.15   | 9.05   |
| Armagh        | 0       | 0       | 0      | 1.00   | 3.70   | 24.83   | 37.19   | 12.24  |
| Ballymena     | 0       | 1.00    | 4.00   | 3.00   | 6.79   | 15.39   | 24.10   | 4.00   |
| Ballymoney    | 0       | 0       | 0      | 1.00   | 2.00   | 6.98    | 5.81    | 0      |
| Ballynahinch  | 0       | 0       | 0      | 0      | 1.00   | 5.73    | 11.12   | 2.00   |
| Banbridge     | 0       | 1.00    | 1.00   | 6.00   | 5.20   | 13.42   | 15.40   | 3.00   |
| Bangor        | 0       | 0       | 0      | 1.00   | 2.00   | 16.64   | 21.37   | 2.81   |
| Belfast       | 10.00   | 65.25   | 158.37 | 301.82 | 428.03 | 1184.74 | 2332.65 | 332.23 |
| Carrickfergus | 0       | 0       | 0      | 1.00   | 1.00   | 7.47    | 13.70   | 1.80   |

| Location    | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | DP   | SO    | E01   | E02    | A0     | AA    |
|-------------|---------|---------|------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| Coleraine   | 0       | 1.00    | 2.00 | 4.00  | 12.66 | 20.55  | 34.11  | 7.69  |
| Cookstown   | 0       | 0       | 0    | 0     | 0     | 3.80   | 7.58   | 0     |
| Londonderry | 0       | 2.00    | 9.38 | 24.15 | 38.41 | 181.46 | 357.19 | 74.61 |
| Downpatrick | 0       | 0       | 0    | 1.00  | 1.81  | 14.14  | 15.98  | 4.00  |
| Dungannon   | 0       | 1.00    | 1.00 | 3.00  | 4.79  | 17.30  | 26.63  | 5.38  |
| Enniskillen | 0       | 0       | 0    | 2.00  | 2.00  | 15.89  | 20.47  | 7.00  |
| Kilkeel     | 0       | 0       | 0    | 0     | 1.00  | 4.00   | 6.24   | 2.20  |
| Larne       | 0       | 0       | 0    | 1.00  | 2.00  | 6.94   | 13.77  | 3.60  |
| Limavady    | 0       | 0       | 0    | 0     | 1.00  | 2.60   | 7.56   | 0     |
| Lisburn     | 0       | 0       | 0    | 1.00  | 1.00  | 17.74  | 28.70  | 9.60  |
| Lurgan      | 0       | 0       | 0    | 1.00  | 2.00  | 13.73  | 22.66  | 5.40  |
| Magherafelt | 0       | 0       | 0    | 1.00  | 3.81  | 21.53  | 34.39  | 5.40  |
| Newcastle   | 0       | 0       | 0    | 1.00  | 1.00  | 7.00   | 12.02  | 3.00  |
| Newry       | 0       | 1.00    | 1.00 | 1.00  | 3.81  | 19.61  | 31.03  | 9.28  |
| Newtownards | 0       | 0       | 0    | 0     | 2.00  | 17.24  | 19.13  | 3.81  |
| Omagh       | 0       | 0       | 0    | 3.00  | 6.24  | 25.56  | 30.91  | 3.00  |
| Portadown   | 0       | 1.00    | 1.00 | 2.00  | 6.92  | 10.96  | 25.72  | 5.00  |
| Strabane    | 0       | 0       | 0    | 1.00  | 2.77  | 14.49  | 18.69  | 3.00  |

### Housing Executive Properties: Heating

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Development, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the average cost of (a) heating installations; (b) oil heating installations; and (c) natural gas installations in Housing Executive properties; and (ii) how many of the installations were for (a) oil heating; (b) oil heating in a gas enabled area; and (c) natural gas connections, broken down by district office area.

**(AQW 8794/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The information is not available in the format requested. In relation to (i), the Housing Executive has advised that the average cost of a heating installation for the last three years is as follows:-

- 2009/10 £5,575
- 2010/11 £5,539
- 2011/12 £5,679

These figures cannot be separated into oil and gas installations.

In relation to (ii), the table below details the number of oil and gas heating installations by Housing Executive district office area. It is not possible to determine exactly which oil installations occurred in gas-enabled areas on a scheme by scheme basis. However, the majority of Housing Executive stock is located in urban areas which are gas enabled.

| District Office | 2008/09 |     | 2009/10 |     | 2010/11 |     | 2011/12 |     |
|-----------------|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|
|                 | Gas     | Oil | Gas     | Oil | Gas     | Oil | Gas     | Oil |
| West Belfast    | 115     | 7   | 113     | 10  | 133     | 5   | 97      | 1   |
| South Belfast   | 35      | 0   | 49      | 0   | 62      | 1   | 51      | 0   |
| North Belfast   | 92      | 1   | 493     | 0   | 217     | 1   | 175     | 1   |
| East Belfast    | 51      | 1   | 45      | 0   | 23      | 0   | 71      | 1   |
| Shankill        | 90      | 11  | 108     | 8   | 68      | 3   | 76      | 1   |
| Antrim          | 186     | 48  | 407     | 27  | 92      | 6   | 104     | 6   |

| District Office           | 2008/09 |     | 2009/10 |     | 2010/11 |     | 2011/12 |     |
|---------------------------|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|
|                           | Gas     | Oil | Gas     | Oil | Gas     | Oil | Gas     | Oil |
| *Ballycastle              | 0       | 75  | 0       | 4   | 0       | 26  | 0       | 25  |
| Ballymena                 | 30      | 29  | 29      | 19  | 206     | 11  | 66      | 8   |
| Ballymoney                | 7       | 21  | 1       | 89  | 20      | 35  | 1       | 6   |
| Carrickfergus             | 44      | 4   | 52      | 3   | 41      | 2   | 73      | 4   |
| Coleraine                 | 41      | 39  | 5       | 18  | 1       | 15  | 31      | 5   |
| Larne                     | 42      | 3   | 19      | 5   | 1       | 32  | 52      | 2   |
| Newtownabbey <sup>1</sup> | 147     | 13  | 39      | 2   | 44      | 1   | 16      | 4   |
| Newtownabbey <sup>2</sup> | 75      | 5   | 44      | 15  | 4       | 2   | 88      | 51  |
| Bangor                    | 229     | 16  | 99      | 9   | 78      | 8   | 215     | 7   |
| Castlereagh               | 56      | 3   | 82      | 8   | 31      | 7   | 84      | 5   |
| Downpatrick               | 1       | 62  | 2       | 117 | 2       | 103 | 2       | 124 |
| Lisburn Antrim St         | 35      | 38  | 81      | 52  | 160     | 27  | 84      | 47  |
| Lisburn Dairyfarm         | 49      | 5   | 73      | 7   | 120     | 3   | 17      | 1   |
| Newtownards               | 93      | 38  | 118     | 38  | 91      | 30  | 31      | 20  |
| Armagh                    | 0       | 35  | 0       | 28  | 0       | 27  | 37      | 24  |
| Banbridge                 | 83      | 72  | 58      | 53  | 6       | 23  | 7       | 37  |
| Dungannon                 | 0       | 108 | 0       | 43  | 1       | 59  | 1       | 101 |
| *Fermanagh                | 0       | 99  | 0       | 82  | 0       | 62  | 0       | 26  |
| Newry                     | 4       | 85  | 68      | 61  | 11      | 39  | 70      | 79  |
| Portadown                 | 0       | 15  | 1       | 26  | 143     | 16  | 164     | 2   |
| Lurgan                    | 51      | 28  | 62      | 48  | 45      | 45  | 32      | 18  |
| *Cookstown                | 0       | 15  | 0       | 39  | 0       | 28  | 0       | 37  |
| Limavady                  | 1       | 34  | 4       | 30  | 48      | 10  | 3       | 28  |
| *Magherafelt              | 0       | 90  | 0       | 25  | 0       | 7   | 0       | 104 |
| *Omagh                    | 0       | 8   | 0       | 19  | 0       | 14  | 0       | 72  |
| *Strabane                 | 0       | 67  | 0       | 77  | 0       | 15  | 0       | 93  |
| Collon Terrace            | 103     | 33  | 77      | 28  | 53      | 18  | 149     | 17  |
| Waterloo Place            | 53      | 44  | 62      | 24  | 84      | 4   | 234     | 9   |
| Waterside                 | 82      | 31  | 146     | 32  | 113     | 7   | 135     | 10  |

\* Gas not enabled in these District Office areas

The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

## Social Housing

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Social Development how many families that have applied for social housing in each of the last three years have been assessed as requiring a (a) four; (b) five; or (c) six bedroom house.

**(AQW 8884/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The information is only available in the format requested for the last two financial years. The table below details the number of applicants who have been added to the Waiting List over the last two years requiring (a) four; (b) five; or (c) six bedroom accommodation: -

| Year    | 4 Bed | 5 Bed | 6 Bed |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| 2009/10 | 352   | 26    | 2     |
| 2010/11 | 383   | 31    | 3     |

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### Neighbourhood Renewal: Capital Projects

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Development how many Neighbourhood Renewal capital projects are anticipated in the 2011-15 budget period.

**(AQW 8915/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The Department for Social Development is contractually committed to progress 57 Neighbourhood Renewal capital projects across Neighbourhood Renewal areas within Northern Ireland during the 2011/12 financial year. Some of these projects will continue into the 2012/13 financial year. There are a further 6 projects planned for the 2012/13 financial year, however, these will be subject to the necessary approvals being in place. At this stage there are no firm commitments in place for capital spend for the 2013/14 or 2014/15 financial years.

### Disability Living Allowance: Unsuccessful Claims

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) how many people have had their initial Disability Living Allowance claim disallowed; (ii) of those who appealed, how many were (a) successful; and (b) unsuccessful; and (iii) the percentage of appeals that were successful, broken down by (a) constituency; and (b) council area.

**(AQW 8941/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:**

- (i) Table 1 below details the total number of Disability Living Allowance initial claims that were unsuccessful in each of the last three years.

**Table 1**

| Year    | Unsuccessful applications |
|---------|---------------------------|
| 2008/09 | 12,000                    |
| 2009/10 | 12,016                    |
| 2010/11 | 9,978                     |

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- (ii) Appeals are received from applicants who have been unsuccessful in their application for Disability Living Allowance (nil award) and also from those who have been awarded the benefit but are dissatisfied with the level of award made. Information on Disability Living Allowance appeals is recorded on an overall number basis and not distinguishable by the circumstances of the decision under appeal therefore it is not possible to quantify how many unsuccessful applicants subsequently progressed to appeal. Table 2 below details the number of Disability Living Allowance appeals determined and the outcomes in each of the last three years.

**Table 2**

| Year    | Number of Appeals Determined in the Appeal Service | More Advantageous Decision | Less Advantageous Decision |
|---------|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2008/09 | 5,753  | 1,942                      | 3,811                      |
| 2009/10 | 5,147  | 1,836                      | 3,311                      |
| 2010/11 | 4,607  | 1,651                      | 2,956                      |

- (iii) The data held by the Appeals Service IT System cannot be broken down by constituency or local council area.

### Employment and Support Allowance: Unsuccessful Claims

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) how many people have had their initial Employment and Support Allowance claim disallowed; (ii) of those who appealed, how many were (a) successful; and (b) unsuccessful; and (iii) the percentage of appeals that were successful, broken down by (a) constituency; and (b) council area.  
**(AQW 8942/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:**

- (i) The table below provides a breakdown of the total number of claims where entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance has ceased in each of the last three years. In some instances, customers may have lost their entitlement on more than one occasion and therefore the Department cannot provide the specific information requested.

| Year             | Employment and Support Allowance* |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Apr 09 to Mar 10 | 12,827                            |
| Apr 10 to Mar 11 | 17,672                            |
| Apr 11 to Nov 11 | 12,770                            |

The information provided above is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by the UK Statistics Authority.

\*The figures provided have been derived from scans of the Department's Matching Intelligence Database Analysis and General Matching Service systems and include cases where a customer has been found fit for work, has failed to attend a medical assessment or has not provided the required information. The figures also include claims where entitlement has ceased following changes in a customer's circumstances including when a customer returns to work, claims an alternative benefit or the death of a customer.

- ii) The information requested regarding appeals is not available in the format requested. However, details of all appeal results, which includes claims where entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance has ceased, is set out in the table below:

| Year          | Appeals upheld in customer favour | Appeals upheld in Department's favour | Total Appeals results |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2009-10       | 354                               | 861                                   | 1215                  |
| 2010-11       | 1410                              | 3374                                  | 4784                  |
| 2011-Jan 2012 | 1639                              | 3000                                  | 4639                  |
| Total         | 3403                              | 7235                                  | 10638                 |

- iii) The information requested is not available by constituency or council area.

### Farm Produce: Roadside Sales

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Social Development what licences or permits are required for an individual to sell fresh farm produce at the roadside.

**(AQW 8956/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** Selling farm produce at the roadside is regulated under the Street Trading Act (Northern Ireland) 2001. Under this Act a street extends to any road, footpath, or public place. A person engaged in street trading is required to have a street trading licence issued by the district council in which the trading is taking place.

### Farm Produce: Roadside Sales

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Social Development what penalties or enforcements are applicable to individuals who sell fresh farm produce at the roadside without the appropriate licence or permit.

**(AQW 8957/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** It is an offence for a person to engage in street trading without a licence issued by the council in which the trading is taking place or to contravene the conditions of a licence in relation to the trading location or the days and times during which trading can take place. An authorised officer of a council or a police constable may seize goods and any receptacle or equipment being used in the course of the trading, and on summary conviction of any of the above offences a court may impose a fine of up to £1000.

## Welfare Reform: Parity

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has had any discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland regarding the nature of the significant flexibility which he has stated exists within the confines of parity.

**(AQW 8973/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** I can confirm that I have had a number of discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Owen Paterson, Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare Reform (Lords), and Maria Miller, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Minister for Disabled People on a range of issues arising from the Coalition Government's Welfare Reform programme. These discussions have included the potential for flexibilities, within the confines of parity, to meet specific challenges that may arise from the implementation of the proposed Welfare Reform changes in Northern Ireland.

I have also written to the Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith, MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and I am intending to meet with Lord Freud in London next week.

## Disability Access: Cleaver House

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister for Social Development whether access for people with disabilities to The Appeals Service, Cleaver House will be taken into account when planning any changes to Donegall Square, Belfast.

**(AQW 8974/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** On 21 February 2012 I announced the appointment of a Design Team to develop a number of options to improve the public realm within the vicinity of Donegall Square in Belfast City Centre. The Design Team will be carrying out extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including representatives of disabled people, before I select a preferred option for the area. Access requirements for people with a disability to the Appeals Service in Cleaver House and indeed all premises/businesses in the project area will be given a high priority during the development of the various design options.

## Citizens Advice: Funding

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the level of funding allocated to Citizens Advice in each of the last five years, broken down by constituency.

**(AQW 9066/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** My Department funds Citizens Advice (CAB) organisations at a regional level to ensure provision of infrastructure support to local CAB offices, and at frontline level to ensure delivery of advice services in line with Departmental priorities. The Social Security Agency also funds benefit programmes through the regional Citizens Advice NI, who then allocate these funds to their front line Citizens Advice offices. It would not be meaningful to break this information down by constituency as the registered address of the organisation does not always reflect the constituencies in which support and services are delivered. Funding to CAB at regional level in the last five years is as follows:

|         | Regional Support | SSA Programmes |
|---------|------------------|----------------|
| 2007-08 | 552,268          | 166,920        |
| 2008-09 | 636,038          | 287,030        |
| 2009-10 | 652,853          | 137,907        |
| 2010-11 | 669,806          | 260,855        |
| 2011-12 | 649,898          | 262,338        |

DSD funding for frontline advice services is made through the Community Support Programme. This programme is delivered by 26 local councils who have responsibility for commissioning local advice services from a range of providers, including CAB, to meet the needs of their own area. The Department does not have information on individual council allocations to CAB through this programme, nor is it possible to break this down by constituency. However, I can provide details of DSD's funding allocation for advice services to each council. In addition to the Community Support Programme, DSD provides funding for frontline advice projects through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. Funding for advice provision through each council is set out below.

### Community Support Programme funding for advice services:

|                                | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Antrim Borough Council         | 16,883  | 25,208  | 22,883  | 22,883  | 47,743  |
| Ards Borough Council           | 26,194  | 57,573  | 52,194  | 52,194  | 67,089  |
| Armagh City & District Council | 20,186  | 49,470  | 40,186  | 40,186  | 40,186  |
| Ballymena Borough Council      | 25,229  | 38,229  | 29,539  | 39,539  | 39,359  |

|  | <b>2007-08</b>   | <b>2008-09</b>   | <b>2009-10</b>   | <b>2010-11</b>   | <b>2011-12</b>   |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Ballymoney Borough Council               | 8,171            | 7,014            | 12,244           | 12,244           | 12,244           |
| Banbridge District Council               | 12,657           | 45,987           | 42,657           | 42,657           | 42,657           |
| Belfast City Council                     | 309,725          | 555,815          | 469,902          | 469,902          | 469,902          |
| Carrickfergus Borough Council            | 11,300           | 11,884           | 22,142           | 22,142           | 22,142           |
| Castlereagh Borough Council              | 23,121           | 27,596           | 32,571           | 32,571           | 32,571           |
| Coleraine Borough Council                | 24,184           | 59,377           | 40,102           | 40,102           | 40,102           |
| Cookstown Borough Council                | 16,619           | 58,860           | 51,619           | 51,619           | 51,619           |
| Craigavon Borough Council                | 46,839           | 46,839           | 58,169           | 58,169           | 58,169           |
| Derry City Council                       | 107,491          | 318,799          | 107,491          | 107,491          | 107,491          |
| Down District Council                    | 22,631           | 47,882           | 47,882           | 47,882           | 47,882           |
| Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council | 17,970           | 54,814           | 33,887           | 33,887           | 33,447           |
| Fermanagh District Council               | 17,244           | 48,744           | 39,244           | 39,244           | 39,244           |
| Larne Borough Council                    | 11,881           | 20,536           | 20,536           | 20,536           | 20,536           |
| Limavady Borough Council                 | 15,181           | 15,181           | 23,181           | 23,181           | 23,181           |
| Lisburn City Council                     | 69,099           | 109,098          | 109,098          | 109,098          | 109,098          |
| Magherafelt District Council             | 11,994           | 398,994          | 35,994           | 35,994           | 35,994           |
| Moyle District Council                   | 9,457            | 12,844           | 12,844           | 12,844           | 12,844           |
| Newry & Mourne District Council          | 49,922           | 79,922           | 79,922           | 79,922           | 79,922           |
| Newtownabbey Borough Council             | 30,991           | 56,423           | 49,686           | 49,686           | 56,423           |
| North Down Borough Council               | 22,653           | 42,653           | 48,758           | 48,758           | 48,758           |
| Omagh District Council                   | 25,229           | 50,229           | 25,229           | 25,229           | 40,000           |
| Strabane District Council                | 47,149           | 47,149           | 72,899           | 72,899           | 72,899           |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>1,000,000</b> | <b>1,927,120</b> | <b>1,590,859</b> | <b>1,590,859</b> | <b>1,656,682</b> |

**Neighbourhood Renewal funding for advice services:**

|                           | <b>2007-08</b> | <b>2008-09</b> | <b>2009-10</b> | <b>2010-11</b> | <b>2011-12</b> |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Limavady Borough Council  | -              | 18,475         | 18,986         | 19,512         | 19,128         |
| Derry City Council        | 118,373        | 231,726        | 238,137        | 244,726        | 243,297        |
| Strabane District Council | -              | -              | -              | -              | 42,221         |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>118,373</b> | <b>250,201</b> | <b>257,123</b> | <b>264,238</b> | <b>304,646</b> |

Additionally CAB has also received funding from DSD through a range of funding programmes not directly related to advice provision e.g. volunteering small grants scheme, Modernisation Fund. Funding from these sources to CAB, by council area, in the last five years is as follows:

|                               | <b>2007-08</b> | <b>2008-09</b> | <b>2009-10</b> | <b>2010-11</b> | <b>2011-12</b> |
|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Belfast City Council          | 110,807        | 100,008        | 96,270         | 3,729          |                |
| Ballymena Borough Council     |                |                | 700            |                |                |
| Carrickfergus Borough Council | 920            | 740            |                |                |                |
| Larne Borough Council         |                |                | 700            |                |                |
| Lisburn City Council          |                |                | 854            |                |                |



|                                 | 2007-08        | 2008-09        | 2009-10       | 2010-11     | 2011-12    |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|------------|
| Newry & Mourne District Council |                |                | 500           |             |            |
| Strabane District Council       | 1,000          |                |               |             |            |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>112,727</b> | <b>100,748</b> | <b>99,024</b> | <b>3729</b> | <b>Nil</b> |

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### Disciplinary Action: DSD Staff

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of staff disciplinary actions taken by his Department in each of the last two years, at Staff Officer level and above, including details of the offence and the disciplinary sanctions applied. **(AQW 9126/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** A total of 4 staff in the Department for Social Development, at Staff Officer level and above, were disciplined in the last two years. Details of the offences and the disciplinary sanctions applied are set out in the table below.

| Year | Offences   | Sanctions  |
|------|--|--|
| 2010 | Breach of Official Instructions/ Breach of Procedures<br>Criminal Conviction<br>Misuse/Abuse of Internet and Email | Formal Written Warning and ban from promotion<br>Written reprimand<br>Demotion, Final Written Warning and ban from promotion |
| 2011 | Misuse of Official Equipment   | Written reprimand and fine   |

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### Boiler Replacement Scheme: Carrickfergus/Larne/Newtownabbey

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Social Development how many successful applications for the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme were from the (i) Carrickfergus; (ii) Larne; and (iii) Newtownabbey areas. **(AQW 9131/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** Formal approval to commence boiler replacement works have been issued to 142 households in the Carrickfergus, Larne and Newtownabbey District Council areas. To date 100 new boilers have been installed. The table below provides a breakdown for each area.

|               | Formal Approvals | Completions |
|---------------|------------------|-------------|
| Carrickfergus | 18               | 16          |
| Larne         | 26               | 17          |
| Newtownabbey  | 98               | 67          |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>142</b>       | <b>100</b>  |

I would urge anyone still waiting for work to be carried out in their home to make contact with their preferred installer urgently to ensure the work is completed as soon as possible as the pilot will close on 31 March 2012.

### Housing Executive: Temporary Accommodation in North Down

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development how many private properties in the North Down area are currently being used as temporary accommodation by the Housing Executive. **(AQW 9162/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The information is not available in the format requested as this is not collated in relation to the North Down area. However, the Housing Executive currently uses 24 private landlord properties as temporary accommodation in their Bangor District office area.

### Jobs and Benefits Offices: Centralisation

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has plans to centralise any Jobs and Benefits Offices.  
(AQW 9171/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** I am committed to maintaining a strong network of front line offices throughout Northern Ireland. Customers will continue to be able to access social security services from the existing network of Jobs & Benefits and Social Security offices.

### Work Capability Assessments: Cancer Patients

**Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration has been given to the need to interview cancer patients, who are in hospital undergoing chemotherapy treatment, to determine if they remain eligible to receive benefits under Welfare Reform.

(AQW 9264/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** As part of his second independent review of the Work Capability Assessment, Professor Malcolm Harrington asked Macmillan Cancer Support to look in detail at how the Work Capability Assessment assesses people with cancer and to provide him with recommendations for further improvements. In response to Professor Harrington's findings, the Department has undertaken a public consultation process seeking views from cancer patients and other interested groups on the proposed changes to the Work Capability Assessment for cancer patients. The consultation process formally ends on 9 March. In view of the consultation the Department has no plans at this stage to interview cancer patients for Work Capability Assessments.

Recommendations made by Professor Harrington are also being taken into account when developing Personal Independence Payment, which will replace Disability Living Allowance for working age customers (age 16 -64) from 2013. The proposals for Personal Independence Payment are that no customers will be required to undergo an assessment by an Independent Health Professional while an inpatient in hospital.

As part of the Departments continuing focus on benefit uptake, Macmillan Cancer Support has recently been funded, through the Innovation Fund for Increasing Benefit Uptake, to test a fresh approach to working in hospitals and in the community with those newly diagnosed with cancer, those living with cancer and those caring for someone with cancer.

### Community-based Initiatives: Funding

**Mr Byrne** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total level of funding his Department allocated for community based initiatives in 2007/08; 2008/09; 2009/10; and 2010/11 in the (i) Erne North; (ii) Erne West; and (iii) Erne East wards in Co Fermanagh.

(AQW 9274/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** The Government Funders Database records the following funding allocated by my Department to community organisations in the Erne North; Erne West; and Erne East electoral areas. This funding has been administered through the following programmes; Community Volunteering Scheme 2006/2010, Local Community Fund 07/08, The Modernisation Fund Capital, Community Regeneration and Improvement Special Programme (CRISP), Volunteer Bureau Initiative 10/11 and Supporting People.

|                       | 2007/2008         | 2008/2009          | 2009/2010          | 2010/2011         |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Electoral Area</b> |                   |                    |                    |                   |
| Erne North            | £27,968.07        | £53,271.00         | £5,975.00          | £1,471.00         |
| Erne West             | nil               | £165,367.77        | £535,790.43        | £1,748.00         |
| Erne East             | nil               | £1,200.00          | £700.00            | £68,687.72        |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>£27,968.07</b> | <b>£219,838.77</b> | <b>£542,465.43</b> | <b>£71,906.72</b> |

In addition, the Voluntary and Community Unit has provided funding through the Community Support Programme, administered through Fermanagh District Council, for the Fermanagh Council Area.

| Funding Programme           | 2007/2008  | 2008/09     | 2009/10     | 2010/11     |
|-----------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Community Support Programme | £97,830.00 | £100,247.00 | £147,383.00 | £105,549.00 |
| Total                       | £97,830.00 | £100,247.00 | £147,383.00 | £105,549.00 |

## Social Housing Development Programme

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Social Development (i) when the Social Housing Development Programme for the next three years will be approved; and (ii) how soon after its approval construction will commence.

**(AQW 9285/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** While I am now in receipt of a draft Social Housing Development Programme I am disappointed it remains incomplete and is simply not yet approvable. This is unacceptable and I have advised the Housing Executive of this. Further meetings have been arranged and I remain hopeful of publishing the new 3 year programme in April/May, subject to the Housing Executive completing the necessary work to allow me to make a proper assessment.

In terms of construction starting, that will depend on the progress Housing Associations have made on their sites in terms of procurement and planning etc. However the budget for next year is already in place so there is nothing to stop construction work proceeding on approval of the Programme, subject of course to the necessary approvals being in place.

## Outer North Youth Arts and Culture Programme: Funding

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister for Social Development whether funding for the Outer North Youth Arts and Culture Programme will be extended until 31 March 2013 to enable Greater Shantallow Community Arts to seek a new funder.

**(AQW 9288/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** All applications for Neighbourhood Renewal funding will be assessed in line with the relevant eligibility criteria and against the stated objectives of the programme. An application seeking funding for a city wide youth service project has been received by my Department's North West Development Office and is currently being assessed. In developing this project proposal the four Londonderry Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships have engaged with those currently providing youth provision, including the Greater Shantallow Community Arts organisation. The need identified for the area covered by that organisation has been incorporated into the city wide project proposal now being assessed. This assessment will be completed by the end of March and a decision issued as appropriate.

## Fuel Allowance Payment: Qualifying Benefits

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the one-off fuel allowance payment, to detail (i) the rationale in deciding the qualifying benefits; and (ii) who was consulted before the decision was made.

**(AQW 9339/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** In December 2011, the Department for Social Development was designated by the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister to make a Fuel Allowance Payment. The Fuel Allowance Payment was made from the Social Protection Fund which was established by the Northern Ireland Executive in March 2011 to mitigate against the impact of the financial cuts on the most vulnerable in our society. There was a limited amount of money available and the Northern Ireland Executive wanted to make the payments to as many vulnerable people as possible. The Executive agreed to make payments to people in receipt of Pension Credit, Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance Income Based or Income Related Employment Support Allowance on one day, within the qualifying week which was from 12 to 18 December 2011. My department automatically issued payments to eligible people and any person who has not received a payment but believes they are entitled can contact NI Direct on 0300 200 7870. The Department for Health and Social Services was also designated to make a fuel payment to people undergoing treatment for cancer.

## Housing: Repossessions

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he would consider introducing the same safeguards in regard to repossessions that currently exist in Great Britain.

**(AQO 1503/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** In common with the rest of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland already has a number of initiatives, overseen across a number of Departments, in place to help those facing repossession such as: -

- Under my Department, there is Support for Mortgage Interest, for homeowners receiving certain social security benefits;
- My Department also funds a range of Debt Advice Services; the Mortgage Debt Advice Service, operated by Housing Rights Service. The Law Centre, Advice Northern Ireland and Citizens Advice Bureau also help people with other debt problems, which often have knock-on effects on their ability to pay their mortgage;
- Housing Rights Service also provides in-court support and representation services funded through charitable sources;
- Under the Department of Justice, the Court Pre-Action Protocols which require lenders to exercise a degree of forbearance before seeking a court order for repossession;

While I have previously expressed my support for the introduction of a Mortgage Rescue Scheme (which other regions of the UK currently have in place) in the Assembly, I believe it would either help only a small proportion of those facing repossession, or would be extremely expensive to operate. I am conscious that, when allocating money, the Executive must weigh-up other needs, such as those presented by education and health

To illustrate, the National Audit Office published an evaluation report on the Mortgage Rescue Scheme in England in May 2011 which outlined that the scheme there delivered 2,600 completed rescues between January 2009 and March 2011, less than half

of those expected when the scheme was launched. Initial projections for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme in England estimated it would rescue 6,000 households. In only completing 2,600 rescues, and increasing the funding by 40% after launch from £205 to £285 million, the evaluation report suggested the long-term costs of each rescue outweighed the measurable benefits and did not deliver value for money;

The Department for Communities and Local Government spent on average £93,000 for each rescue completed – it expected to spend £34,000. The main reason being that most completed rescues were the mortgage to rent type, with only a minority being shared equity.

The scheme, therefore, did not sustain the level of homeownership for those in difficulty that was originally anticipated.

### **Housing Benefit: Underoccupancy**

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has asked for an impact assessment to be carried out on the consequences of implementing the under-occupancy element of Welfare Reform.

**(AQO 1515/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The Member will be aware that the Welfare Reform Bill at Westminster has now received Royal Assent and that in line with the parity arrangements that exist for Social Security matters, I will soon be bringing my proposals for reform in Northern Ireland to this Assembly.

The 'under-occupancy' element that the Member refers to is one of a number of changes that are being introduced to modernise support for Housing Benefit in Great Britain and, in bringing forward my Welfare Reform Bill I will be seeking to replicate these measures. The proposal, put simply, is that those in receipt of Social Security benefits should only receive assistance according to their housing needs. The policy change is designed to ensure that benefits payable are more closely aligned to housing need and to promote fairness for the taxpayer by ensuring that those on benefits are required to take decisions as to their accommodation in the same way that those in work and in particular those on low incomes must. I will be considering how that proposal, together with other measures being considered will impact here in Northern Ireland. My officials have carried out an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) which has been out to public consultation and I will be looking closely at what respondents to that consultation have raised in respect of the proposed reforms. Given the scale of the proposed reforms and the fact the Bill itself is in effect an enabling Bill with the detail of particular changes being spelled out in Regulations, I would envisage that further work on 'Equality' screening may be necessary as Regulations are brought forward.

Housing Benefit has been the subject of much debate in recent times and I am personally acutely aware of concerns around further change. My officials will continue to gather data to inform decisions on specific reforms, including the 'under-occupancy' element, and to assess the potential impact here in Northern Ireland.

### **Housing Executive: Economy 10 Heating**

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the negotiations that his Department has had with Power NI and others on the development and implementation of Economy 10 heating for Housing Executive properties.

**(AQO 1507/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** Neither my Department nor the Housing Executive have had any negotiations with Power NI on the development and implementation of Economy 10 heating for Housing Executive properties. At the present time Economy 10 is not a tariff that is available in Northern Ireland and if it was introduced here the Housing Executive has advised that it might provide a benefit to only a small percentage of their tenants. In fact electrical heating has not proven to be popular with Housing Executive tenants and many households have lobbied to have it replaced.

The Housing Executive has been replacing electrical heating where gas or oil is a technically practical option. They have reduced the number of homes heated by electrical heating from 26,000 to 8,500, with a further 2300 properties in their provisional programme for the incoming financial year. The Housing Executive's heating policy is that gas remains the only option offered in areas where gas is available. Where gas is not available other options such as oil or wood pellet boilers are considered. In properties where these options are not technically feasible, for example certain multi-storey blocks, tenants are offered a more energy efficient electrical heating system.

The apparent reduction in the use of the Economy 10 tariff in Britain and the fact that electricity suppliers in Northern Ireland have never indicated any intention to consider introducing it here suggests that discussions on the matter are unlikely to succeed.

### **Universal Credit Bill**

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister for Social Development when the Universal Credit Bill will be introduced.

**(AQW 9571/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** I intend shortly to seek Executive Agreement to my proposals to bring forward a Welfare Reform Bill for Northern Ireland. The Welfare Reform Bill will contain enabling provisions introducing Universal Credit.

### Retail Sequencing Policy: Belfast City Centre

**Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Retail Sequencing Policy for Belfast city centre.  
(AQO 1512/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** My Department's retail sequencing policy has delivered the £400 million Victoria Square scheme and our next step is to deliver the proposed £360 million investment for the Royal Exchange project subject to discharging all statutory, contractual and funding approvals for the project. I will announce the timetable for moving forward the Royal Exchange site as soon as my Department is in a position to do so.

### Welfare Reform: Discretionary Fund

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Social Development what decisions have been made, by the Executive Sub-Group on Welfare Reform, on dealing with the worst excesses of the Welfare Reform legislation.  
(AQO 1513/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** The Executive Sub-Committee on Welfare Reform has met on four occasions over the last number of weeks and has considered a range of issues relating to Welfare Reform. At one of its meetings the Sub-Committee discussed areas where flexibilities should be actively pursued with Department for Work and Pensions Ministers. Work is also ongoing with the Department for Work and Pensions to seek clarification on how existing Northern Ireland specific requests will be handled and to determine whether there will be any additional costs.

The Sub-Committee have also considered a wide range of issues around the Welfare Reform Programme including passported benefits, a replacement discretionary fund for Social Fund and rates relief in Northern Ireland. The Sub-Committee has an active work programme and will report regularly to the Executive Committee.

### Community and Youth Groups: Cathedral Quarter, Belfast

**Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on his decision to uplift the level of grant from £300 to £1000 for small community/youth groups that are working in the Cathedral Quarter, Belfast.  
(AQO 1514/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** My Department has issued a news release inviting community organisations to submit applications for funding from the Laganside Community Activities Grant for the year starting on 1 April 2012. Public notices inviting applications will also be published shortly in the press. This increase is designed to encourage community organisations within the 14 Laganside Wards to use the amenities as I am concerned that the uptake of this grant by the community has been low in recent years. The grant will have a total allocation of £50,000 in 2012/13 and could deliver up to fifty community activities.

### Boiler Replacement Scheme

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Development how many boilers were replaced under the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme.  
(AQO 1516/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** I launched the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme in June 2011 and £2 million was allocated to deliver the pilot. 1,330 inefficient boilers will be replaced in the pilot scheme. The pilot has been very popular and the Housing Executive is no longer taking applications for the pilot. The pilot scheme will be subject to a full evaluation which will inform the design of any future scheme. I would urge anyone still waiting for work to be carried out in their home to make contact with their preferred installer urgently to ensure the work is completed as soon as possible as the pilot will close on 31 March 2012.

## Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

### Parliament Buildings: Crèche Facilities

**Ms Boyle** asked the Assembly Commission if it would undertake a survey of Members and staff in Parliament Buildings to assess the demand for crèche facilities.  
(AQW 8949/11-15)

**Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** As a responsible employer, the Assembly Commission provides a range of "family friendly" policies to support its staff. These include childcare support and flexible working arrangements. Childcare support for Members is also available although the qualifying criteria and the quantum are established by the Independent Financial Review Panel.

In the current economic climate, the Commission has no plans to undertake a survey of Members or staff to assess the level of demand for crèche facilities as the Commission's budget for the Spending Review period to 2014/15 does not include any provision for the cost of such a facility.

## Parliament Buildings: Crèche Facilities

**Ms Boyle** asked the Assembly Commission whether it will consider providing crèche facilities at Parliament Buildings to encourage more women to get involved in politics.

**(AQW 8950/11-15)**

**Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The Assembly Commission has a statutory duty under section 40 (4) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to “provide the Assembly, or ensure that the Assembly is provided, with the property, staff and services required for the Assembly’s purposes”. In the absence of a specific direction from the Assembly to the contrary, the Commission does not consider that its role extends to encouraging the involvement of any specific section of the community in politics.

## Mary McAleese: Portrait

**Mr McKay** asked the Assembly Commission what consideration has been given to commissioning a piece of art to mark the retirement of former President Mary McAleese, given her key role in the peace process and that she is a native of Belfast.

**(AQW 9069/11-15)**

**Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** In June 2009, the Assembly Commission agreed a policy to procure portraits for Speakers, First Ministers and deputy First Ministers on their retirement from office. The Commission has not, to date, given any further consideration to expanding this policy to include the commissioning of additional portraits.

## Childcare Scheme: Eligibility

**Mr Beggs** asked the Assembly Commission why staff who work outside Parliament Buildings are unable to join a Childcare Voucher Scheme and are excluded from its Childcare Scheme. [R]

**(AQW 9109/11-15)**

**Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The Assembly Commission does not employ staff who work outside Parliament Buildings. However, it is recognised that many Members employ staff whose salary payments are processed by the Commission on behalf of Members. It is for Members to establish the terms and conditions of employment for their staff and those terms and conditions may include provision for financial support to meet the cost of childcare.

At present, the Commission’s payroll processing service on behalf of Members does not include a fully integrated Childcare Voucher Scheme. However, an exercise to replace the payroll system is at an advanced stage and Members will be notified of the options for childcare support for their staff later this year. Any new system implemented by the Commission will not include a centrally provided childcare scheme as that will remain the responsibility of individual Members.

As the Commission does not employ staff outside Parliament Buildings, the issue of exclusion of staff from the Commission’s childcare scheme does not apply. As noted above, a Member is free to operate a childcare scheme similar to that operated by the Assembly Commission if he or she so wishes.

## Childcare Scheme: Administrative Costs

**Mr Beggs** asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) the current annual cost of administering the Childcare Scheme; (ii) the number of staff who benefit from the Scheme; (iii) the number of staff who work outside Parliament Buildings and could avail of a Childcare Voucher Scheme; and (iv) the savings for (a) employees; and (b) the Commission if staff who work outside Parliament Buildings were able to avail of a Childcare Voucher Scheme if one were introduced. [R]

**(AQW 9110/11-15)**

**Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):**

- (i) The administration costs of the Childcare Scheme are carried by the Commission’s Finance and Human Resources Offices and the annual cost (based on staff hours worked) equates to approximately £3,200 per annum. The total cost of payments made to staff and Members under the scheme for the 2011/12 financial is estimated at £263,000k.
- (ii) There are currently 104 members of staff and 22 MLAs who benefit from the childcare scheme.
- (iii) The Assembly Commission does not employ staff outside Parliament Buildings. However, Members employ staff in their constituency offices and, at present, there are approximately 285 such employees. It is entirely for a Member to decide on the terms and conditions of his or her employees and whether those terms and conditions should make provision for financial support for childcare costs.
- (iv) The taxation implications for Members’ employees who avail of a qualifying Childcare Voucher Scheme are complex and depend on the level of salary of the employee and the level of financial support offered by a Member. In general, an employee paying tax at the basic rate and receiving childcare vouchers under a qualifying scheme at the limits set by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs could save approximately £78 per month in statutory deductions. If all Members introduced a qualifying childcare scheme for all of their 285 employees, a total saving in deductions for all employees of £263,000 could be achieved. However, this would require all Members to establish (and all employees to participate in) a qualifying childcare scheme. A Member who operated such a scheme could save approximately £34 per month per employee in employer’s national insurance contributions leading to a notional saving of £116,000 per annum for all Members for all employees. This level of saving would not accrue to the Assembly Commission as it has no responsibility for the terms and conditions of employment of Members’ employees.

**Childcare Scheme: MLA Staff**

**Mr Beggs** asked the Assembly Commission (i) when it was first approached by staff or MLAs in relation to enabling staff who work outside Parliament Buildings to avail of a Childcare Voucher Scheme; and (ii) why there has been a delay in introducing such a scheme. [R]

**(AQW 9111/11-15)**

**Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):**

- (i) The Assembly Commission does not employ any staff who work outside Parliament Buildings and the Commission does not operate a Childcare Voucher Scheme for its staff. The Assembly Commission cannot provide an exact date when it was first approached by MLAs to enable their staff who work outside Parliament Buildings to avail of a Childcare Voucher Scheme.
- (ii) The Assembly Commission operates a payroll service to process salary payments to Members' employees. It is for Members to establish the terms and conditions of employment for their staff and those terms and conditions may include provision for financial support to meet the cost of childcare. The Commission has no plans to introduce a Childcare Voucher Scheme for Members' employees although it is implementing a revised payroll system that it is hoped will enable Members to set up whatever childcare arrangements they see fit.

**Parliament Buildings: Royal Standard**

**Mr Wells** asked the Assembly Commission why the Royal Standard was not flown during the visit of Her Royal Highness Princess, Anne to Parliament Buildings on 7 March 2012.

**(AQW 9483/11-15)**

**Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The flying of flags at Parliament Buildings is regulated by the Flags (NI) Order 2000.

The Order prescribes the dates during the year when the Union flag should be flown, and also provides some guidance in relation to the flying of the Royal Standard and other flags.

The Order states that the Royal Standard should only be flown if Her Majesty the Queen is visiting.

The Regulations make no reference to the flying of personal standards of other members of the Royal Family, and in any event no such request was made to the Assembly by the organisers of the recent visit by the Princess Anne.





# Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 23 March 2012

## Written Answers to Questions

### Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

#### Fuel: OFMDFM Spend

**Mr McGlone** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much their Department, and its agencies, have spent on fuel in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 8095/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister):** Expenditure on fuel by our Department is set out in the following table. Information is not available for the financial year 2007-08.

#### OFMDFM

| Year    | Fuel Costs |
|---------|------------|
| 2008-09 | £2,000.00  |
| 2009-10 | £2,107.00  |
| 2010-11 | £2,222.86  |

The figures above cover fuel spent on the minibus in use at the Maze/Long Kesh site. The Department commenced leasing the minibus late in 2007. Fuel costs for the initial period January 08 to March 08 where minimal.

#### Northern Ireland Bureau: Representation in the Far East

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether there are any plans to extend the representation of the Northern Ireland Bureau to the Far East.

**(AQW 8473/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We have asked officials to prepare a draft paper by the end of March which sets out proposals for strengthening our profile overseas including a proposed visit to China later in the year. The key objectives of that Strategy will be to accelerate inward investment, to promote tourism and to encourage more overseas students to study here.

#### Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report

**Ms Ritchie** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report.  
**(AQW 9134/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Work such as this contributes to assessing our progress as we move out of conflict.

We already have come a long way as a society and the collective effort at a political, community and individual level must be commended. The report itself highlights the stability of the political institutions and the decrease there has been in the level of violence. However, we know that there is still work to do.

We remain committed to tackling the root causes of division and to building a united community. We also remain committed to publishing an agreed Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy. The cross party working group continues to meet on a weekly basis to finalise the strategy.

### Photographic Services: Ministerial Visits

**Mr Flanagan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how photographers are selected to accompany Ministers on Ministerial visits.

**(AQW 9210/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** In line with public procurement requirements, a contract is in place to provide photographic services. Following a competition administered by the Central Procurement Directorate six photographers were appointed to undertake work on behalf of the NICS. Under the terms of this contract the appointed photographers are invited to submit a tender for each assignment before being selected.

In the event that none of the photographers on the contract are able to undertake an assignment, other photographers may be appointed in line with normal procurement guidance.

### Photographic Services: Contracts

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why it is necessary for their Department to contract out photographic services; and whether this an established practice or a new approach.

**(AQW 9356/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The use of contracted photographers has been standard practice over many years and provides a high quality record of key Ministerial announcements and events. All photographic appointments are made in line with procurement guidance to ensure value for money.

While departmental staff regularly take their own photographs for 'in-house' activities and events, there are occasions where the services of professional photographers with the ability to deliver high quality images to the media are required.

### Photographic Services: Travel outside Northern Ireland

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is the duration of the contract under Project 5873; and, in addition to its basic cost price, whether selected photographers will be paid to travel abroad with Executive Ministers, with all their expenses paid.

**(AQW 9486/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The contract is for an initial period of one year, with the option to extend by three further periods of one year each. The cost price is calculated on the basis of these extensions being taken up.

The contract is for photographic assignments within Northern Ireland.

### Joint Public Services Training Centre

**Mrs Overend** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the Desertcreat Training College Project Team is working with the Strategic Investment Board in relation to tender contracts for the Joint Public Services College.

**(AQO 1609/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Since December 2008, an adviser from the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) has been the Programme Manager for the Joint Public Services Training Centre. He reports to a Programme Board chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable and is responsible for delivering all aspects of the programme. He directs a Programme Team staffed by members of the participating organisations. SIB appointed another adviser to be the project's Procurement Manager and its Legal Director provides further support. Health Estates and the Central Procurement Directorate, as a Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE), are providing advice, as are other staff in SIB as required – for example on the implementation of Social Clauses in procurement.

### NICS Live Event: Fee Structure

**Ms Ritchie** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will ask the Head of the Civil Service to review the fee structure for the NICS Live event in April 2012, to ensure that small and medium sized businesses are not excluded.

**(AQO 1527/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The NICS Live event is owned by Dods, a political information, publishing, events and communications organisation. The event is being run at no direct cost to the Civil Service and the fee structure for the event is set by Dods as it is bearing all the financial risks.

They have offered a partnership to the NICS to inform the content of the event and ensure the seminars, workshops and speakers all support the Programme for Government agenda. Civil Servants will attend for free.

Dods is solely responsible for arranging and negotiating sponsorship, advertising and exhibitions. There is a range of different sponsorship options to suit small and medium size businesses and they can also attend as delegates.

We have spoken to Dods who would be very happy to speak directly to any small and medium sized businesses regarding NICS Live. Dods are quite willing to establish a specific small and medium sized business zone within NICS Live as they have done previously at the Civil Service Live event held in London. If the Member would like to provide the contact details of any small and medium sized businesses who may be interested in attending the NICS Live event we will pass their details directly through to Dods

NICS Live 2012 is free to all Civil Servants and we have negotiated for a number of voluntary organisations to attend for free; however the Civil Service is not responsible for setting delegate fees or sponsorship costs.

This year's event follows the very successful event held in 2010. The theme is the Programme for Government and the event will provide an opportunity to focus on how the NICS can better support Ministers and the Executive in the delivery of quality, cost effective public services.

## Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

### Broadband: DARD Contribution to Fund

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the number of consumers who have benefited from the funding that her Department provided for the Broadband Fund.

**(AQW 8770/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development):** As you know the provision of broadband is the remit of the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment, however to date DARD contributed some £2.554million (£1.564million + £990,000) to DETI's project to provide next generation broadband services to 85% of businesses by 2011. The DARD contribution funded fibre upgrades to some 204 cabinets across the north. In total some £19.8million has been provided to upgrade 1,265 cabinets which has in turn, stimulated BT to upgrade further cabinets. By the end of March 2012 some 2,649 cabinets in urban and rural areas across the north will have been upgraded and BT estimate that 89% of telephone lines will be connected to a fibre upgraded cabinet. Figures on the number of connections on each cabinet are not recorded. However the number of businesses serviced by cabinets upgraded with DARD's funds is estimated to be in the region of 3000 businesses.

The DETI remit is very focused on businesses and going forward any further DARD commitments of funding will be aimed wider at all rural dwellers.

### Circuses: Ban on Wild Animals

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she is aware of the recent announcement that wild animals will be banned in circuses in England; and if she intends to introduce a similar ban.

**(AQW 9192/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I have read the Minister of State for Agriculture and Food, Jim Paice's Written Ministerial Statement on 1 March 2012 and I have noted that he is proposing to ban travelling circuses from using performing wild animals in circuses on ethical grounds, rather than welfare grounds. I am also aware that in the interim Defra has opened a consultation on 1 March 2012, seeking views on a proposed licensing scheme that would promote and safeguard the welfare of wild animals in travelling circuses in England.

My priorities on animal welfare over the coming period will continue to be the roll-out of the new provisions in the Welfare of Animals Act 2011, including new subordinate legislation on the welfare of farmed animals, dog breeding establishments, permitted procedures and the tail docking of dogs. Continuing to provide advice and guidance to support Councils during the first year of their new animal welfare enforcement role in relation to other (non-farmed) animals, which starts next month, is also a key priority.

At this time, I have no plans to introduce a ban on animals in circuses. However, I can assure you that I intend to take the time to assess the available evidence and give the issue detailed consideration. I will also take advice on the legal implications and on the proportionality of the options open to me so that the welfare of animals in circuses is fully protected. I will also need to consider the required legislative framework to support each option.

I would want to examine developments in the south of Ireland as well as England, Scotland and Wales and engage with stakeholders, including circus operators and their representatives, to ensure that their views are properly considered. In addition, I would wish to take into account developments in Europe, particularly in relation to the proposed new EU Animal Welfare Strategy for 2012 - 2015.

While we have no circuses based in the north, there are a number of circuses registered in the south, some of which regularly travel here. My Department has an agreed protocol with the Department of Agriculture,

Food and the Marine in the south which provides for an inspection of animals from these registered circuses before moving back to the south.

### Agricultural Shows: Funding

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much funding her Department has given to agricultural shows in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9202/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The table below lists the total funding provided by my Department to agricultural shows in each of the last five years:

|      |        |
|------|--------|
| 2007 | £5,000 |
|------|--------|

|      |        |
|------|--------|
| 2008 | £5,275 |
| 2009 | £5,000 |
| 2010 | £5,000 |
| 2011 | £6,000 |

### Dogs: Surgical Removal of Vocal Chords

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what legislation is in place to regulate the surgical removal of vocal chords from dogs; and for her assessment of this legislation.

**(AQW 9238/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 only a veterinary surgeon can remove the vocal chords from a dog. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) view is that de-voicing of dogs is unacceptable and if it cannot be justified by the veterinary surgeon as being undertaken for the purpose of medical treatment, then it would almost certainly be considered by the RCVS to be disgraceful conduct by a veterinary surgeon and subject to disciplinary proceedings.

The Welfare of Animals Act 1972 makes it an offence for anyone to subject any animal (other than a fish, bird or reptile) to any operation which involves interference with sensitive tissue or bone structure of the animal, without the use of an anaesthetic.

Once Section 5 of the new Welfare of Animals Act 2011 is commenced in April these powers will be strengthened as it will be an offence for a Lay Person to undertake a Prohibited Procedure which includes the removal of vocal chords from a dog. The 2011 Act also increases the maximum penalty on summary conviction to imprisonment for such an offence from 3 months to 6 months and/or a £5000 fine and on conviction on indictment to 2 years imprisonment and / or an unlimited fine.

I am satisfied that the legislation that we have in place is sufficient to protect dogs from the unnecessary removal of their vocal chords.

### Common Agricultural Policy: Small Businesses

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the Common Agricultural Policy could be reformed to meet the needs of small businesses.

**(AQW 9249/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Common Agricultural Policy proposals for the 2014-2020 period include a number of measures to support micro, small and medium sized enterprises in both the agricultural and non-agricultural sector. Substantial income support for family farms, nearly all of which could be classified as small and medium sized enterprises, will continue post 2013 in the form of direct payments under Pillar I. The Pillar II proposals have a greater emphasis on innovation, knowledge transfer, training and co-operation, as well continued support for new business start-up (with a particular focus on young farmers), development of small farms, farm diversification and support for existing rural businesses. My Department is continuing to work to secure a well funded, simplified and flexible CAP which can be tailored to meet local industry requirements.

### Single Farm Payment: Effect of CAP Reform

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the changes to the Single Farm Payment if the proposed reform of the Common Agricultural Policy is adopted, including the costs involved.

**(AQW 9250/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The proposals for the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) published by the EU Commission on 12 October 2011 would result in major changes to the system of farm support. Firstly, the Single Farm Payment would be replaced by a number of payments, including a basic payment, a 'greening' payment, a top-up payment for new young entrants and a small farmer payment. In addition, there are options to introduce coupled payments and payments for Areas of Natural Constraint. These proposed changes, if agreed, would inevitably increase the complexity of the direct payments system.

Another feature of the current proposals is a move away from historically based payments towards a flat rate payment regime, which would lead to a major redistribution of support among claimants.

There would undoubtedly be additional administration costs arising from these changes, but as these are initial proposals which will undoubtedly be modified during the negotiations, I have not attempted to estimate the additional costs of administration at this stage. However, the EU Commission's Impact Assessment of the proposed reform of CAP suggests that administration costs could rise by 15%. A number of Member States have suggested this may be an underestimate and I would share that concern.

### Agricultural Sector: Deregulation

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the deregulation of the agricultural sector.

**(AQW 9251/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** It is not an objective of my Department to deregulate the agricultural sector. It is vitally important for everyone that an appropriate level of regulation is in place which protects the public, protects our reputation as a food producing region and allows businesses to grow.

The purpose of the ongoing work on better regulations is to review the current most burdensome regulations with the aim being to simplify where possible and ultimately to reduce the overall administrative burden to the agri-food sector.

The NI Agri-Food Better Regulation and Simplification Review and the subsequent Better Regulation Action Plan are key steps in identifying the most costly areas of administration and setting about reducing their impact on businesses within this very important sector. I am also keen to ensure that the administrative burden created by future new or revised regulations is minimised.

### **Meat Exportation Certificates: China**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what representations she has made to Westminster regarding the equality of access to export certificates for meat exportation to China.  
**(AQW 9252/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Along with our pork exporters I welcomed the recent agreement of a health certificate to facilitate the export of pork from pigs born, reared and slaughtered in the north. My officials are currently working with interested Food Business Operators to help them attain the required premises approval to enable them to export to China.

During negotiations of the certificate my officials worked with their Defra colleagues to get agreement from the Chinese authorities to allow the export of pork derived from pigs of southern origin, however the Chinese insisted upon the Britain and north of Ireland only clause. This is the same position in the south where only pork derived from pigs of southern origin may be exported.

In order to open this export market to all pork derived from pigs slaughtered in the north I have asked my Defra and DAFM counterparts, as well as Ministerial Colleagues, to consider if they can provide any assistance in reopening negotiations. I am awaiting their advice.

Poultry meat and other red meat export negotiations are taken forward under the auspices of the relevant export negotiation group. As a reserved matter Defra leads these Groups however both our industry and my officials have input to ensure our exporter's needs are reflected, where possible, in the negotiations. The priorities for the Groups are collectively set by the industry with China being considered a high priority for all meat.

### **Rural Development Projects/Community-based Initiatives: Fermanagh**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total spend by her Department on rural development projects and community based initiatives in Co.Fermanagh in (i) 2007/08; (ii) 2008/09; (iii) 2009/10; and (iv) 2010/11.  
**(AQW 9263/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The total spend by my Department on rural development projects and community-based initiatives in County Fermanagh was: £4,568,816 in 2007/08; £4,235,366 in 2008/09; £4,581,161 in 2009/10; and £4,966,256 in 2010/11. These figures do not include expenditure on joint or shared projects where it is not possible to separate out expenditure benefitting County Fermanagh alone.

A detailed breakdown is provided in the table below:

#### **Spending on rural development projects and community-based initiatives in County Fermanagh in (i) 2007/08; (ii) 2008/09; (iii) 2009/10; and (iv) 2010/11**

|                                      | <b>2007/08</b> | <b>2008/09</b> | <b>2009/10</b> | <b>2010/11</b> |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>Project</b>                       |                |                |                |                |
| Leader +                             | 286815         | 30163          | 119058         | 0              |
| Rural Challenge                      | 0              | 0              | 0              | 22042          |
| Rural Childcare                      | 0              | 0              | 0              | 81179          |
| Renewing Communities Pilot Scheme    | 64391          | 57838          | 0              | 0              |
| Building Sustainable Prosperity      | 48828          | 37130          | 0              | 0              |
| Community-based initiatives          | 63900          | 43285          | 78456          | 74184          |
| Farm Family Options Skills           | 0              | 0              | 0              | 24236          |
| Farm Family Options Mentoring        | 0              | 0              | 0              | 3108           |
| Focus Farms                          | 0              | 0              | 30319          | 49541          |
| Processing and Marketing Grant (1.2) | 0              | 0              | 481198         | 525160         |

|  | 2007/08          | 2008/09          | 2009/10          | 2010/11          |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Farm Modernisation Programme (1.3)                             | 0                | 0                | 175909           | 37366            |
| Countryside Management   | 3945870          | 3841455          | 3609839          | 3887306          |
| Woodland Grant Scheme (capital payment)                        | 82952            | 125413           | 40814            | 0                |
| EU-funded  | 44912            | 68977            | 15688            | 0                |
| Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (annual payment - current scheme) | 20556            | 16174            | 15085            | 7175             |
| EU-funded  | 10592            | 8592             | 8240             | 2583             |
| Farm Woodland (annual payment - legacy scheme)                 | 0                | 4920             | 2350             | 2350             |
| EU-funded  | 0                | 1419             | 656              | 402              |
| Axis 3   | 0                | 0                | 3551             | 249625           |
| <b>Total by year</b>   | <b>4,568,816</b> | <b>4,235,366</b> | <b>4,581,161</b> | <b>4,966,256</b> |

**Notes:**

- (1) In 2007/08 and 2008/09 sums of £469,315 and £517,085 were spent respectively in border counties under Interreg IIIA. While County Fermanagh was one County benefitting from this expenditure it is not possible to separate out the Fermanagh-only spend. Therefore no allowance is made for this in the total spend.
- (2) Similarly, it is not possible to provide county-specific information for two agri-environment schemes, the Countryside Access Scheme and the Habitat Improvement Scheme, or for the new Organic Farming Scheme, and again no allowance is made for expenditure under these schemes in the total spend.

**Common Agricultural Policy: Woodland Cover**

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 7214/11-15, for her assessment of the impact that the proposed changes to the Common Agricultural Policy will have on the Executive's target of doubling the amount of woodland cover, and the impact on the financial support that is available to parties seeking to create woodland.

**(AQW 9289/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Negotiations on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post 2013 have a long way to go and I have already met the European Commission on CAP reform issues and further meetings are envisaged.

I welcome the Commission's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) proposals to increase support for establishment of woodland up to 100% of costs, that land eligible in 2008 and subsequently planted under the Woodland Grant Scheme remains eligible for Single Farm Payment, and that woodland on arable land can be included as Ecological Focus Areas. However, we do not have very much of that kind of land, and the Commission proposal to restrict the loss of permanent pasture on an individual farm holding to 5% is a significant challenge for woodland creation. I am also concerned that Commission proposals to exclude income foregone payments will make woodland planting options much less attractive.

Our aim to double the forest area requires a change from agricultural use at a rate of only 0.2% each year. In principle, that sounds achievable, but the Commission proposals for CAP reform make practical difficulties because of the small size of many farm holdings.

**Rural Development Community Service: Selection Criteria**

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the process and criteria used to select the areas chosen for delivery of the Rural Development Community Service; and why these areas were chosen.

**(AQW 9294/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) provided information on the number of people and income deprived people living in rural Output Areas. This information, along with the need identified during the consultation process, was used in the rationale for selection of the areas and the allocation of funding in the Economic Appraisal for delivery of a Rural Community Development Service, which has been approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

**Rural Development Community Service: Funding**

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how funding for delivery of the Rural Development Community Service will be allocated to the eight areas selected for the project.

**(AQW 9296/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The allocation of funding to the eight areas selected for delivery of a Rural Community Development Service was based on information provided by the NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) about the number of people and income deprived people living in rural Output Areas. This was subjected to an Economic Appraisal which has been approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

### **Rural Development Community Service: Funding**

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the funding for delivery of the Rural Development Community Service, which was allocated to each of the eight selected areas, reflects the size of the rural population in those areas; and to outline the rationale for the award of the funding to each area.

**(AQW 9298/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) provided information on the number of people and income deprived people living in rural Output Areas. This was used as the rationale for the allocation of funding in the Economic Appraisal for delivery of a Rural Community Development Service which has been approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

### **Broadband: Rural Areas**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the provision of rural broadband; and what proposals she has for higher speed broadband in rural areas.

**(AQW 9303/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** As you know the provision of broadband is the remit of the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment however, to date DARD contributed some £2.554million (£1.564million + £990,000) to DETI's project to provide next generation broadband services to 85% of businesses by 2011. The DARD contribution funded fibre upgrades to some 204 cabinets across the north of Ireland. In total some £19.8million has been provided to upgrade 1,265 cabinets which has in turn, stimulated BT to upgrade further cabinets. By the end of March 2012 some 2,649 cabinets in urban and rural areas across the north of Ireland, will have been upgraded and BT estimate that 89% of telephones lines will be connected to a fibre upgraded cabinet. Figures on the number of connections on each cabinet are not recorded. However the number of businesses serviced by cabinets upgraded with DARD's funds is estimated to be in the region of 3000 businesses.

DETI primarily focus on broadband access for businesses but DARD will have a wider focus including all rural dwellers. I have recently announced that I would like to invest further DARD funds to increase the quality and coverage of broadband in rural areas and work to assess how best to do this is ongoing.

### **Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department will ensure that the proposed Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations do not unnecessarily penalise small scale breeders, or encourage the breeding of larger numbers in order to recoup costs, which could lead to an increase in unwanted puppies, breeders taking less care in relation to where they sell puppies and the suitability of the owners, and to dogs being abandoned.

**(AQW 9312/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The commercial breeding of dogs is a legitimate business both here and across these islands and I do not intend to place any unnecessary burden on small, medium or large scale dog breeders. The draft Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations set out the minimum standards required for commercial breeding establishments to ensure that the welfare needs of breeding bitches, dogs and pups are met. Where good breeders are already operating to these minimum standards, the costs to them to implement these Regulations will be limited to the annual licence fee and microchipping their pups and these costs will be very low.

The new Regulations propose to introduce a new breeding establishment licence system which includes a sliding scale of fees, determined by the number of breeding bitches in the establishment. The introduction of the breeding establishment licence is to ensure that Councils, who will enforce these Regulations, recover their full costs when approving and inspecting breeding establishments. I intend to ensure that the fees, whilst allowing the Council to cover their costs, are kept at a realistic level. The proposed licence fee for a small breeding establishment i.e. no more than 10 bitches is £150. Whilst microchipping pups will be a compulsory requirement before the pup leaves the breeder, there will be no requirement for a veterinary surgeon to undertake the microchip. Once a breeder is competent at microchipping they can microchip their own pups, so the cost should only be a few pounds per pup.

I do not see any breeders increasing the number of pups they breed to cover these small costs. However the draft Regulations also include proposals on the minimum and maximum ages for breeding a bitch and maximum number of litters a bitch can produce in her lifetime. This proposed new requirement whilst aimed at improving and protecting the long term welfare of the bitch will also ensure that bitches are not continuously bred to cover any new costs associated with these Regulations.

Enforcement of these proposed new Dog Breeding Establishments Regulations will, as outlined above, rest with Councils who enforced the current 1983 Dog Breeding Establishment Regulations. The proposal in the draft Regulations which requires a licensed breeder to microchip all pups before they leave the premises will assist Council inspectors to identify the owner or breeder of an abandoned pup or dog.

A draft Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) was carried out prior to the public consultation which took place from October 2011 to January 2012. A specific question was included in the consultation seeking evidence based information on any future costs to breeders. Whilst some stakeholders commented on possible costs, other stakeholders were of the view that most breeders already operate to these proposed standards, so little if any costs would be incurred. No information was provided from any breeders on actual costs they would incur.

I wish to see that all dog breeding establishments in the north operate to good welfare standards and that they produce high quality pups, both pedigree and non-pedigree. The proposal in the draft Regulations will ensure all commercially bred pups have the best possible start in life.

## **Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there will be an opportunity for further input from interested parties into the proposed Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations.  
**(AQW 9314/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The 12 week public consultation on the proposed Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (NI) 2012 closed on 10 January 2012. That consultation, which issued to over 2,000 consultees, was the formal opportunity for dog breeders, specialist interest groups, councils and the general public to comment on the proposals contained within the draft Regulations. A substantial number of responses were received from that process and my officials are currently analysing these. In addition I met with one industry representative body that represents a number of dog breeders in the north and my officials met with another industry representative body to hear at first hand their views and concerns about the draft Regulations.

It is not my intention, at this time, to undertake any further consultation on these draft Regulations. However, I can assure you that I will consider all the relevant issues raised in the consultation responses before deciding on the final detail of the draft Regulations.

The ARD Committee will have the opportunity to consider the consultation responses and scrutinise the draft Regulations before I seek Executive agreement to lay them in the Assembly for debate under the draft affirmative resolution procedure before the summer recess. Any interested party has the right to make an application to come before the Committee to make representations on the proposed Regulations.

In bringing forward these Regulations I do not want to place unnecessary, potentially onerous requirements on legitimate dog breeders, but I do intend to provide sufficient powers to ensure that sub-standard breeders take the necessary steps to improve the conditions within their breeding establishments.

## **Dogs: Attacks on Livestock**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she will take to address the low prosecution rates for dog attacks on livestock.  
**(AQW 9332/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The control of dogs here is legislated for by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011.

Local Councils are responsible for enforcing this legislation, including taking forward any prosecutions. As Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development I am responsible for Dog Control policy and legislation. However, how that legislation is implemented, enforced and how prosecutions are taken forward is the responsibility of the Councils here; and how the law is interpreted is a matter for the Courts. Councils do not fall under my area of responsibility.

All incidents of straying, dog attacks and livestock worrying are investigated by Council Enforcement Officers and it is for Councils to decide the appropriate action to be taken. The Councils have formed a Dog Advisory Group to ensure a consistent approach to enforcement across Council jurisdictions.

## **Away-days and Team-building Exercises: Cost-effectiveness**

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department assesses the cost-effectiveness of awaydays and team-building exercises.  
**(AQW 9341/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Department does not have a formal means of assessing the cost effectiveness of away days and team building exercises. Business areas involved are required to set targets and objectives and review progress at the end of each event – they are also required to adhere to guidelines on the use of facilities and restrictions on hospitality.

## **Woodland: UK Forestry Standard**

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether all the bodies or organisations within her Department's remit which own woodland are compliant with the UK Forestry Standard, including her Department, any arm's-length body and any organisation to which her Department provides grant aid.  
**(AQW 9385/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Forestry Standard is the formal statement of commitment to sustainable forestry. The 3rd edition of the Standard was published in October 2011 following a period of consultation. The Standard makes reference to our Forestry Act



2010, and the associated requirements of good forestry practice. It applies to all woodland, and serves to achieve a balance between the interests of forestry in delivering social benefits, as a commercial business and safeguarding the environment.

Woodland owned by my Department is managed in accordance with the Standard. Support for private woodland owners, through grants administered by Forest Service, is subject to confirmation that work undertaken meets the requirements of the Forestry Standard and its supporting guidelines. Agricultural land, including small areas of woodland, are supported under the Countryside Management Scheme and are required to comply with Good Agricultural & Environmental Condition (GAEC) cross-compliance rules and management requirements of the Scheme. The management of this woodland is consistent with the Forestry Standard.

### **Tuberculosis-free Areas**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there can be allocated tuberculosis free areas within a region of a European member state.

**(AQW 9455/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** A Member State or part or region of a Member State may be declared officially tuberculosis-free providing it meets certain conditions specified in Council Directive 64/432/EEC ("the Trade Directive").

Crucially the percentage of bovine herds confirmed as infected with tuberculosis must not exceed 0.1% of all herds - and at least 99.9 % of herds must have achieved officially tuberculosis-free status - for 6 consecutive calendar years.

While Scotland has been able to satisfy these conditions, no other part of these Islands is in a position to do so in the near future. Nor are there any Counties or Divisional Veterinary Office areas in the north of Ireland that could satisfy these criteria either.

Bovine TB is a complex and multi-factorial disease that is very difficult to eradicate. There is no cheap, quick-fix solution for TB, but our ultimate aim is to eradicate TB here.

### **Bovine Viral Diarrhoea**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to tackle Bovine Viral Diarrhoea.

**(AQW 9456/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** At farm level, production diseases such as BVD can have a significant impact on productivity and competitiveness and I welcome the fact that there is an increasing desire within industry here to tackle such diseases that are not subject to statutory control measures. As is the case in other regions where these issues are being addressed, there has to be a clear industry lead to make such animal health initiatives work.

My Department is currently supporting an industry-led BVD research project through the Research Challenge Fund, which aims to determine the prevalence of the BVD virus here. My officials are closely engaged with an industry BVD Working Group and are considering what, if any, further assistance can be given to the industry-led BVD eradication initiative. As a result of discussions at the BVD Working Group in February, my officials recently facilitated a discussion on the IT requirements of any eradication programme. Hopefully, this will assist industry in scoping the requirements and the potential costs involved.

For any eradication programme to be successful there must be widespread buy-in from the farming community in order to create demand for BVD control. As the industry in the south has shown, in order to get this buy-in, farmers must first be well informed. My officials are therefore considering whether funding support could be available under the Rural Development Programme's knowledge transfer measures to help farmers understand the steps that they can take to tackle such diseases and the economic benefits to them of doing so.

Key stakeholders and my officials are currently discussing a proposed new strategic partnership approach to tackling such diseases, with the intention that this would build on the work industry is already doing on BVD. This approach should be welcomed as a way of driving forward an eradication programme here.

BVD is not a statutory disease and its impacts are primarily felt at farm level so it is for industry to take the lead in initiatives to deal with it, as happens in other places. Industry commitment to funding such initiatives will be key. To find new funding from within DARD's budget would mean re-allocating money that is already committed elsewhere. However, reducing costs in other areas, such as TB and brucellosis compensation, may assist in making funding available to help support initiatives here to deal with production diseases.

### **Schmallenberg Virus**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she can introduce a temporary ban on the import of livestock in order to protect against the Schmallenberg Virus, given that it is not a notifiable disease.

**(AQW 9476/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** There is no indication that the EU Commission intends to introduce conditions for the movement of animals because of Schmallenberg Virus. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union enshrines the key principle of the free movement of goods and services between Member States. I am not in a position to unilaterally introduce a ban on imports to protect the national stock from this virus, as under section 24 of the NI Act 1998, the Department has no power to do anything in contravention of Community law.

Until we have more information the best way to protect against Schmallenberg Virus is for those importing animals to the north to source stock responsibly.

### **Meat: Religious Slaughter**

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there are any meat producers who use methods of religious slaughter; and what action her Department is taking to monitor meat production to ensure that animal welfare is protected.

**(AQW 9497/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** One small slaughterhouse employs a licensed slaughterman trained in religious slaughter procedures. He works no more than one day a month processing a very small number of sheep. All these animals are effectively stunned by electrical means before slaughter. None of the local meat producers use "non-stun" slaughter.

I believe the standard of animal welfare in slaughterhouses here is high. Official Veterinarians from my Department are present in every slaughterhouse during the entire time animals are being slaughtered. The majority of this time is spent in the vicinity of the lairage and stunning area where they can monitor the slaughter process. This ensures that the highest standard of animal welfare is maintained at all times.

I take the welfare of animals very seriously and if I thought that the introduction of further measures such as the introduction of mandatory CCTV were necessary to protect animal welfare I would not hesitate to act. However, experience at slaughter here does not highlight any issue which might require the introduction of mandatory CCTV as a solution. Furthermore, 14 of the 20 slaughterhouses here, which together account for over 95% of the animals and birds slaughtered in the north, have voluntarily installed CCTV coverage of the stunning area already. As for the remaining establishments, my officials have already communicated my preferences on this matter to those operators and I intend to personally write to them to ask if they would consider voluntarily installing CCTV in the stunning area.

### **Local Action Groups: Guidance**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when her Department will issue guidance on strategic project development to Local Action Groups.

**(AQW 9505/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My officials met with representatives from all the clusters individually and outlined the development process and criteria. Officials further met with the Administrative Managers on 19th January 2012 to discuss the proposals coming forward from the clusters and to issue hard copy guidance notes to assist in the development of any potential projects.

### **Strategic Project Funding**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what types of organisations are eligible to apply for strategic project funding.

**(AQW 9506/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Local authorities, NGO's and the community sector including social economy enterprises will be eligible to apply for strategic projects. The key will be the ability to deliver the project within the criteria and especially on time.

### **Local Action Groups: Audits**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any proposals to introduce monthly or bi-monthly audits of Local Action Groups; and the sanctions that would be applied as part of any proposed audit process.

**(AQW 9507/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** As part of my Departments ongoing responsibility as Managing Authority for the NI Rural Development Programme my officials are constantly engaged in financial management to ensure that low spend is identified, managed and appropriate remedial action taken.

### **Carbon Reduction Targets**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department plans to contribute to the carbon reduction targets contained in the Kyoto Protocol.

**(AQW 9512/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Climate Change Targets

We are required to contribute to a range of climate change targets. While climate change is a global issue it requires action at a number of levels. At the highest level the Kyoto Protocol secured commitments from 37 major industrialised countries and the European Community to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This eventually led to the European Union setting a target of reducing GHG emissions from 1990 levels by 20% by 2020 (the EU is now under some pressure to raise this target to 30% as it is felt by some that the current target is not sufficiently challenging). The UK Climate Change Act 2008, which the Executive agreed should extend here, established a legislative framework to enable the north of Ireland and Britain to reduce its

GHG emissions by 80% from 1990 levels by 2050 and by 34% by 2022. These Climate Change Act targets are set at a north of Ireland and Britain level and there are no specific targets in legislation here or in England or Wales. Scotland have made their own legislative arrangements. However, recognising the importance of climate change to the north, the previous Executive set a target in its Programme for Government of reducing NI GHG emissions by 25% by 2025. The current Executive has, in its Programme for Government (2011-15), set a new, more ambitious, target of a 35% reduction by 2025.

My Department input to DOE, who are the lead department in respect of climate change, on the range of climate change mitigation measures that are being taken forward in conjunction with our agriculture and forestry industry stakeholders. The Agriculture and Forestry Greenhouse Gas Stakeholder Group, chaired by my officials, issued a Reduction Strategy and Action Plan 'Efficient Farming Cuts Greenhouse Gases' in 2011 to help meet the climate change challenge.

### **Human-induced Soil Degradation**

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what differences there are in the levels of human induced soil degradation in the land east and west of the River Bann.

**(AQW 9549/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My department does not gather specific information on human induced soil degradation. My department does, however, support various research studies and surveys carried out by the Agri Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), where changes in soil fertility, soil carbon content and soil erosion risk are monitored. Maps which illustrate the geographic variability in these soil health indicators are publically available (see weblink belows).

[http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned\\_reports/325.pdf](http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/325.pdf)

<http://www.afbini.gov.uk/index/services/services-specialist-advice/soils-environment.htm>

### **Woodland: Countryside Management Scheme**

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many hectares of woodland have been created as a result of the Countryside Management Scheme.

**(AQO 1569/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Countryside Management Scheme is one of three agri-environment schemes that provide funding to encourage farmers to create small areas of native broadleaf woodland by planting native trees. The maximum area of native tree planting that can be planted on one farm is one hectare or five per cent of the eligible area. Currently the total area of native tree planting carried out by agri-environment scheme participants is 625 hectares. Of this, 522 hectares were planted under the previous Countryside Management Scheme and 26 hectares were planted under the new Countryside Management Scheme. The remaining 77 hectares were planted under the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme.

### **Single Farm Payment: Receipt by 31 March 2012**

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an estimate of the percentage of farmers who will have received their Single Farm Payment by 31 March 2012.

**(AQO 1574/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I anticipate that between 93% and 94% of all 2011 Single Farm Payments will be completed by 31 March 2012. In total more than £246 million has now been paid out.

This leaves less than 7% of claims left to process with a maximum of £21 million potentially still to be paid for the 2011 scheme year. These claims are outstanding for a number of reasons, including the need to apply inspection findings, probate; or because the claimant has not provided bank account details. Not all the remaining cases may be due a payment because of ineligibility or the application of penalties under scheme rules.

### **Brucellosis: Eradication Target**

**Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the 2014 target for the eradication of brucellosis is on schedule to be met.

**(AQO 1571/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** We are very much on target to achieve brucellosis eradication by the target date of March 2014.

Currently there are only 11 herds in the north still under restriction due to brucellosis. The most recent confirmed herd incidence level (December 2011) is 0.02%. Eradication of brucellosis by 2014 is one of our objectives in the Programme for Government, which will allow us to subsequently seek EU Officially Brucellosis Free (OBF) status.

However, eradication depends entirely on continued co-operation and compliance from herd owners in completing testing and in reporting abortions to enable us to remove the last vestiges of brucellosis from Northern Europe. Herd owners must understand that unreported abortions or any other suspicions of disease may jeopardise that target date.

## Agrifood: World Markets

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the recent visit by the Vice President of China to Ireland, for her assessment of the potential for the agri-food sector in Asia and other world markets.

**(AQO 1570/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Chinese Vice President's recent visit to Ireland was a positive development aimed at taking bilateral relations forward and to pave the way for increased trade with China.

I am encouraged by this and the opportunities that lie ahead for the agri-food sector. The world's population is growing rapidly and is projected to increase by one billion by 2030 and two billion by 2050. There are also opportunities arising from Asian diets becoming more westernised and I believe that the agri-food sector is well placed to exploit these opportunities with its strong record of export-led growth.

InvestNI has a key role in promoting our food sector internationally and does so through a programme of trade missions, exhibitions and events. I understand that recently, InvestNI hosted an information event in Belfast highlighting the marketing opportunities in China for local companies processing proteins. Later this year, I also understand that InvestNI is planning a food and drink sector trade mission to China and my Department is willing to support in whatever way it can.

I have been working with DETI to establish an Agri-Food Strategy Board to develop a growth strategy up to 2020. In doing so, it will be vital that industry sets challenging but achievable growth targets and this will involve consideration of wider global markets.

In preparing for export growth it is important that we continue to promote quality. For example, the EU's Protected Food Names scheme can be used successfully to help protect local products against imitation and to showcase the quality food we produce.

My Department will continue to support the sector in its efforts to grow further and we will continue to work alongside other Executive Departments and industry to maximise the potential of this crucial part of our economy at home and abroad.

## Rural Crime

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what work she has undertaken in recent months with the PSNI to address rural crime.

**(AQO 1572/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I met the Chief Constable in January to highlight the increase in rural crime, including the rise in theft from farms, and the very high level of concern it is causing within the farming community. The Chief Constable has since written to notify me of a recent intelligence led investigation which led to the recovery of stolen items including a tractor, plant and tools. As a result of this investigation I understand that an individual is to appear at Court in the coming weeks charged with handling stolen goods. I welcome this investigation which the Chief Constable believes has disrupted an Organised Crime Gang and plan to arrange a follow-up meeting with the Chief Constable to further discuss how we can work together to tackle rural crime and how DARD Direct Offices can be used to disseminate information to rural dwellers.

I will continue to work closely with the Minister of Justice on raising awareness of rural crime and I welcome local initiatives brought forward by Community Safety Partnerships to prevent rural crime such as trailer marking and the forensic marking of sheep. I am encouraging farmers to participate in these initiatives and to continue to ensure that they secure their properties by taking steps to minimise the risk of theft from their farms.

My Department's Veterinary Service Enforcement Branch has also been working closely with the PSNI in dealing with rural crime including carrying out joint on farm inspections, training some members of the PSNI in areas of livestock movement and identification and establishing 24/7 communication channels.

I am also planning to attend the launch of a Farmwatch Scheme aimed at reducing thefts from the rural community in County Fermanagh in the near future.

I also plan to meet with Martin Callinan, the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána to discuss cross border rural crime, particularly the recent attacks on staff from the Loughs Agency of Foyle Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC).

## Agriculture: European Funding

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's engagement with European Commission officials about increasing the level of drawdown of European funds to increase innovation in the agricultural and agri-food sectors.

**(AQO 1573/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** We are working hard to bring more European funding into the agri-food and rural sectors. This means that my officials sit on the Barosso Taskforce Working Group (BTWG), which was set up to help the area benefit from better participation in European policies, programmes and funding streams. This is a cross departmental initiative and all of us are working towards increasing drawdown of funding to 20% above current levels. My department will do this by helping our principal research and innovation provider, the Agri-Food Biosciences Institute (AFBI), access research funding streams.

To date we have worked with the BTWG on an inward European official visit held in March 2011, which gave AFBI an opportunity to build relationships with key European officials. Engagement is ongoing with an outward visit to Brussels planned for late

March. DARD and AFBI officials on this visit, planned for the 27 - 29 March, will meet with European Commission (CION) officials to discuss further opportunities for funding draw down associated with Framework 7 and Horizon 2020.

Other profile raising activities which my officials have been involved in include attendance at European innovation events, such as the recent CION Conference "Enhancing innovation and delivery of research".

### **Food NI: 'Taste of Ulster'**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether Food NI has any plans to extend the Taste of Ulster Food Guide to feature shops and producers from Counties Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan.

**(AQO 1575/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Taste of Ulster is a voluntary registration scheme managed and delivered by Food NI which is a private company limited by guarantee, formed voluntarily by a consortium of food sector representatives, to develop a positive identity for high quality local food. The Taste of Ulster Guide is currently predominantly a restaurant guide highlighting accredited eating establishments which use quality, local produce.

The 2012 Guide, which has been launched this week, has been part-funded through DARD's Regional Food Programme, Food NI having been successful in open competition and at Selection Panel. All eating establishments featured in the guide will have attained that inclusion through application, having passed inspection and fulfilled all necessary criteria.

All applicants are required to undertake an accreditation process which is confidential to Food NI although they have confirmed that a defined percentage of produce used by the hospitality outlets must be sourced locally in order to become an accredited Taste of Ulster member. Applications are welcomed from all counties in Ulster although I am aware that no applications were received from any hospitality outlets in Cavan, Donegal or Monaghan.

## Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

### **Salmon Netsmen: Compensation**

**Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether any financial provision has been made to compensate salmon net fishermen in the event that her Department fails to issue them with a licence without good reason; and if so, to detail the level of compensation.

**(AQW 9143/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** The Department has not entered into any discussions with the salmon net fishermen on the issue of compensation should licenses not be issued to them for the 2012 season.

### **2012 Olympics: Training**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what work she is undertaking to attract Olympic teams to use Northern Ireland as their training base; and what teams have confirmed that they will be based here.

**(AQW 9231/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Work to attract countries for pre Games training began in 2007 by ensuring local venues were included in the London 2012 pre Games training camp guide. A delegation with representatives from my Department, SportNI and Local Government went to the Beijing Games in the Summer of 2008 where they promoted the North of Ireland as a pre Games training destination to all National and Paralympic Committees.

Members of the Pre Games Training Camp Subgroup have attended many major sporting events both abroad and in the UK to promote local venues for pre Games training.

Over 200 National Olympic Committees have been targeted with relevant marketing information. Specific presentations and bids for teams have been prepared for 20 National Olympic Committees.

All local Governing Bodies of sport were invited to engage with their counterparts in other countries.

100 international Ambassadors and Consulars have been hosted at local pre-Games events to establish relationships with their respective countries.

To date the North has secured 8 sports or teams to participate in pre Games training camps in the run up to the London 2012 Games.

The teams are the Chinese Artistic Gymnastics Team, the Australian Boxing Team, the Irish Paralympics Team, the Jordanian Paralympic Team, the Kuwait Athletic Team, the Sudanese Athletic Team, the Egyptian Athletic Team and the Qatar Athletic Team.

In addition a number of pre Games events involving international athletes have taken place in the north of Ireland. These include the Boccia World Cup, a 2012 Paralympic qualifying event; a table tennis tournament; and the Yonex Irish Badminton Championships, a 2012 Olympic qualifying event. An international wheelchair basketball tournament also took place at the Antrim Forum in February 2012.

Further sensitive negotiations are underway with a number of other countries about locating pre Games training and qualifying events here. This is a highly competitive process and therefore I am unable to detail these countries or sports at this stage.

### Hospitality: Spend

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 8073/11-15, whether the figures provided include the Department's arm's-length bodies; and if not, to provide this information for each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9354/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The figures provided in the response to AQW 8073/11-15 did not include the Department's arms-length bodies. Figures for total spending on hospitality for these bodies has been provided below.

|         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 2006/07 | £26,863 |
| 2007/08 | £26,710 |
| 2008/09 | £54,601 |
| 2009/10 | £62,191 |
| 2010/11 | £40,043 |

These figures do not include spending on hospitality by the Department's North/South bodies. These bodies have a financial year running from January to December and so, their spending on hospitality in the last 5 calendar years is shown separately below:

|      |         |
|------|---------|
| 2007 | £5,968  |
| 2008 | £11,102 |
| 2009 | £15,378 |
| 2010 | £7,123  |
| 2011 | £9,156  |

### Royal Ulster Constabulary Athletic Association

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department has any role in promoting the change in the name of the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Athletic Association; and whether there has been any suggestion that a failure to change the name will have funding implications, and to outline why this would effect the funding the organisation receives.

**(AQW 9383/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I am aware of reports in the media that members of the RUC Athletic Association are meeting later this month to vote on a proposal to change the name of the Association. My Department has no role in promoting this change or the change in the name of any sporting organisation. Furthermore, Sport NI, which is responsible for the distribution of funding for sport in the north of Ireland, advises that the name of a sporting organisation is not part of any assessment criteria for funding

### Ancestral Homes

**Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what level of importance her Department places on the ancestral homes of prominent people within Northern Ireland's history.

**(AQW 9453/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Ulster American Folk Park which forms part of National Museums NI, is home to a wide variety of historic buildings from throughout the north of Ireland. These include as part of the outdoor exhibition, two ancestral homes of prominent people which are managed out of NMNI's current budget allocations. They are the historically significant Mellon House, childhood home of Thomas Mellon, founder of the Mellon Bank in the United States of America and McKinley House, ancestral home of William McKinley, American President 1897 – 1901.

Outside of these examples my Department does not have any remit or role to play with regard to ancestral homes which are in private or charitable ownership.

### Irish Language: E-publishing

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps her Department is taking to develop e-publishing in the Irish language; and what resources she will allocate to this area.

**(AQW 9529/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** As the main statutory body for the promotion of the Irish language, Foras na Gaeilge has been involved in developing e-publishing in the Irish language, through An Gúm and Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge.

The An Gúm website allows schools to download titles and it is intended to provide electronic versions of all the text books as each new textbook is made available.

Also this year Foras na Gaeilge intend to reprint three major Gaeltacht titles in e-book form - Lá Dár Saol (Seán Ó Cíomhthain), An Mothall Sin Ort (Seán Ó Ruadháin) and Mám as mo Mhála (Seán Mac Meanman) which will be sold on Kindle platform and other formats.

Foras na Gaeilge have also met with IT providers such as Apple to develop products for the iPad and iAuthor software.

Clár na Leabhar Gaeilge over the past three years has provided funding for four publishers to develop aspects of e-publishing - Cló Mhaigh Eo; Leabhar Breac; Cló Iar-Chonnacht and Cois Life

### **Líofa 2015: Development Officer**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 9035/11-15, if she will publish the business case for the appointment of a Líofa Development Officer; and to identify the budget area from which funding for this position will be drawn.

**(AQW 9543/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Líofa Development Officer will be responsible for the ongoing development of the Líofa initiative. Currently over 1634 individuals have signed up to the initiative.

The budget in relation to the Líofa Development Officer will be drawn from my Department's overall administrative budget.

I will direct my officials to publish the business case in relation to this decision on the DCAL website.

### **Milk Cup: Funding**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the discussions that officials from her Department or Sport NI have had with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to the provision of funding for the Milk Cup; and to detail the outcome of these discussions.

**(AQW 9544/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** In June 2011, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the NI Tourist Board sought a meeting with officials from my Department and Sport NI to discuss the provision of funding for the 2011 Milk Cup. The outcome of these discussions was that it would not be appropriate or necessary for DCAL to intervene. Since that meeting there have been no further discussions between my officials and DETI regarding funding for the Milk Cup.

### **Sporting Tournaments: Funding**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the amount of funding that her Department provided to the organisers of international sporting tournaments that were held in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years; and to list each event and the amount of funding awarded.

**(AQW 9546/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The table below sets out the funding provided to the organisers of international sporting tournaments in each of the last three financial years. This includes funding provided both by the Department's former Events Unit and through Sport NI.

**2008/09**

| <b>Funder/Sponsor</b> | <b>Event</b>                              | <b>Requested</b> | <b>Awarded</b> |
|-----------------------|---|------------------|----------------|
| DCAL Events Unit      | 2008 Foyle Cup                            | £55,000          | £50,000        |
| DCAL Events Unit      | International Indoor Athletics Tournament | £15,000          | £7,500         |
| Sport NI              | International Indoor Athletics Tournament | £15,000          | £15,000        |
| DCAL Events Unit      | 2008 Milk Cup                             | £50,000          | £48,700        |
| Sport NI              | 2008 Milk Cup                             | £15,000          | £15,000        |
| Sport NI              | World Blind Golf Championships            | £27,799          | £16,000        |
| Sport NI              | 2008 World One Armed Golf Championships   | £10,000          | £1,639         |
| Sport NI              | Archery Euronations                       | £10,000          | £6,449         |
| Sport NI              | NI International Horse Show               | £20,000          | £20,000        |

**2009/10**

| <b>Funder/Sponsor</b> | <b>Event</b>                                 | <b>Requested</b> | <b>Awarded</b> |
|-----------------------|--|------------------|----------------|
| DCAL Events Unit      | 2009 Milk Cup                                | £95,000          | £59,678        |
| Sport NI              | 2009 Milk Cup                                | £15,000          | £15,000        |
| DCAL Events Unit      | 5th World Dwarf Games                        | £30,000          | £9,400         |
| Sport NI              | 5th World Dwarf Games                        | £20,000          | £17,561        |
| DCAL Events Unit      | 2009 Foyle Cup                               | £60,000          | £50,000        |
| DCAL Events Unit      | Junior and Cadet World Fencing Championships | £160,000         | £160,000       |

**2010/11**

| <b>Funder/Sponsor</b> | <b>Event</b>  | <b>Requested</b> | <b>Awarded</b> |
|-----------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| Sport NI              | 2010 Milk Cup | £20,000          | £20,000        |

**Sporting Tournaments: Funding**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the amount of funding requested from her Department by the organisers of international sporting tournaments held in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years; and to list each event and the amount of funding awarded.

**(AQW 9547/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The table below sets out the funding requested from and provided to the organisers of international sporting tournaments in each of the last three financial years. This includes funding provided both by the Department's former Events Unit and through Sport NI.

**2008/09**

| <b>Funder/Sponsor</b> | <b>Event</b>                              | <b>Requested</b> | <b>Awarded</b> |
|-----------------------|---|------------------|----------------|
| DCAL Events Unit      | 2008 Foyle Cup                            | £55,000          | £50,000        |
| DCAL Events Unit      | International Indoor Athletics Tournament | £15,000          | £7,500         |
| Sport NI              | International Indoor Athletics Tournament | £15,000          | £15,000        |
| DCAL Events Unit      | 2008 Milk Cup                             | £50,000          | £48,700        |
| Sport NI              | 2008 Milk Cup                             | £15,000          | £15,000        |
| Sport NI              | World Blind Golf Championships            | £27,799          | £16,000        |
| Sport NI              | 2008 World One Armed Golf Championships   | £10,000          | £1,639         |
| Sport NI              | Archery Euronations                       | £10,000          | £6,449         |
| Sport NI              | NI International Horse Show               | £20,000          | £20,000        |

**2009/10**

| <b>Funder/Sponsor</b> | <b>Event</b>                                 | <b>Requested</b> | <b>Awarded</b> |
|-----------------------|--|------------------|----------------|
| DCAL Events Unit      | 2009 Milk Cup                                | £95,000          | £59,678        |
| Sport NI              | 2009 Milk Cup                                | £15,000          | £15,000        |
| DCAL Events Unit      | 5th World Dwarf Games                        | £30,000          | £9,400         |
| Sport NI              | 5th World Dwarf Games                        | £20,000          | £17,561        |
| DCAL Events Unit      | 2009 Foyle Cup                               | £60,000          | £50,000        |
| DCAL Events Unit      | Junior and Cadet World Fencing Championships | £160,000         | £160,000       |
| DCAL Events Unit      | International Indoor Athletics Tournament    | £10,000          | 0              |



| Funder/Sponsor   | Event                             | Requested | Awarded |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| DCAL Events Unit | George Best Celebrity Pro/Am Golf | £50,000   | 0       |

**2010/11**

| Funder/Sponsor | Event         | Requested | Awarded |
|----------------|---------------|-----------|---------|
| Sport NI       | 2010 Milk Cup | £20,000   | £20,000 |

**Líofa 2015: Participation**

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many people have registered to participate in the Líofa initiative, broken down by community background.

**(AQW 9579/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** To date 1628 people have taken up the Líofa challenge.

No information has been requested from Líofa participants regarding their community background.

**Fishing: Prosecutions**

**Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many prosecutions for illegal fishing have been secured in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9612/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The table below details the number of convictions secured by the Fisheries Conservancy Board (up to 31 May 2009) and DCAL for breaches of fisheries legislation in each of the last five years for which records are complete:

| Year | Number Of Convictions |
|------|-----------------------|
| 2006 | 39                    |
| 2007 | 53                    |
| 2008 | 78                    |
| 2009 | 124                   |
| 2010 | 115                   |

**Netting Licences: Lough Neagh**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the current licences granted for netting in Lough Neagh.

**(AQW 9705/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The following nets have been licensed on Lough Neagh as of 20 March 2012.

| Eel draft net | 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 capture of fish other than trout | Bait net |
|---------------|---|---|---|----------|
| 1             | 10  | 43  | 100   | 6        |

Bait net licences can only be purchased by those fishermen purchasing eel long line licences.

**Loughs: DCAL Jurisdiction**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the Loughs for which her Department is responsible.

**(AQW 9706/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Department has responsibility for ensuring fisheries legislation is complied with on all waters in the DCAL jurisdiction

**Salmon Netsmen: Enforcement**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what enforcement action her Department will take to ensure that salmon netting practices cease once netting licences have been issued.

**(AQW 9707/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers will continue to carry out surveillance in the areas in which the netsmen operated to ensure that they are complying with their undertakings and that no other illegal fishing activity is taking place.

### **Salmon Netsmen: Negotiations**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the negotiations that took place with the commercial salmon netsmen in relation to their voluntary agreement not to catch salmon; and (ii) whether negotiations are on-going with the two remaining netsmen who have not yet given robust assurances.

**(AQW 9708/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:**

- (i) Negotiations between the Department and the Coastal Commercial Salmon Net Licence Holders centred on finding a formula that respected the position of the netsmen and provided them with the opportunity to confirm their readiness to take voluntary action to conserve salmon as called for by the Minister.
- (ii) Negotiations are ongoing with the two remaining netsmen with the aim of achieving an agreed voluntary cession for the 2012 season.

### **Foras na Gaeilge: Chief Executive**

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the Chief Executive's office within Foras na Gaeilge.  
**(AQW 9710/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** It is the responsibility of the Chair and Board of Foras na Gaeilge to monitor and assess the performance of the Chief Executive.

Officials from the Sponsor Departments engage regularly with the Chief Executive of Foras na Gaeilge to review progress towards the delivery of agreed business plan targets and key project milestones and to seek assurance that statutory obligations and corporate governance standards are being complied with.

I am aware that there are some operational issues which the Sponsor Departments have asked the Chair and Board to address.

### **Newry to Portadown Canal**

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she intends to discuss at a North South Ministerial Council meeting the potential extension of the remit of Waterways Ireland to include the Newry to Portadown Canal.  
**(AQW 9727/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The issue regarding extending the remit of Waterways Ireland to include additional waterways was discussed at the recent North South Ministerial Council meeting on the 14 February 2012. Ministers concluded that no further action be taken at this time to extend the remit of Waterways Ireland given the current economic circumstances. I will however keep this matter under review.

My Department is exploring with the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) the potential to use canal restoration as a wider urban and rural regeneration initiative to deliver a range of social and economic benefits. This work is at a preliminary stage and will be used to inform the Department's future strategy for the Inland Waterways.

### **Netting: Lough Neagh**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what role her Department or its arm's-length bodies have in the (i) regulation of netting in Lough Neagh; and (ii) enforcement of such regulations.  
**(AQW 9843/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:**

- (i) The legislation covering netting in Lough Neagh is contained in the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 as amended and associated regulations. My Department keeps this legislation under review. Amendments and new regulations are made in light of prevailing circumstances.
- (ii) My Department is responsible for the enforcement of fisheries legislation on Lough Neagh, to ensure that licensed commercial fishermen involved in netting comply with all appropriate requirements.

DCAL Fisheries Protection staff undertake regular patrols on Lough Neagh and surrounding land and waters. Any nets found not to comply with legislation are subject to seizure. Fishermen found not to be in compliance with legislation are reported with a view to prosecution.

## Department of Education

### Buses: Private Hire Costs

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education what action he will take to address the difference in the unit cost of privately operated buses which are 367.3 percent higher in the North Eastern Education and Library Board compared with the Southern Education and Library Board.

**(AQW 8980/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education):** The figure quoted is taken from the recently published report by DFP's Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) following its review of home to school transport. The report highlights a number of areas where there are significant differences in unit costs and indeed in practices from ELB to ELB and identifies a need for greater scrutiny of those differences to test whether there is any justification for them. It contains 29 recommendations highlighting a range of actions that might be taken to improve the efficiency of the home to school transport service

My Department will now be moving forward with actions designed to respond to these recommendations. This work will include addressing the apparent difference in unit costs for private operator buses between Boards

### Schools Budget: Special Educational Needs Allocation

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Education to detail the proposed funding for special needs in the schools budget in the 2012/13 to 2014/15 financial years, with specific reference to the proportion of the budget allocated to special needs and the rise or fall in the overall allocation.

**(AQW 9362/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am aware of the value and importance of the support provided to some of our most vulnerable children with special educational needs and their families. In recognition of this, when setting Budget 2011-15 allocations, I agreed that a number of frontline services should be afforded protection. This includes funding for Special Educational Needs. As a result no reductions in funding allocations for Special Schools have been included in my Department's Savings Delivery Plan.

Funding for special needs is not provided for within the schools budget, it is funded directly by ELBs from available Block Grant supported by a range of designated earmarked budgets for separate initiatives. Block Grant funding is distributed to ELBs annually via the Assessment of Relative Needs Exercise (ARNE) formula to reflect the relative needs within their respective areas. ELBs have full discretion on the prioritisation of funds allocated to them and it is not therefore possible to determine the level of funding attributable to special needs until financial plans (Resource Allocation Plans) have been received by the Department.

### Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005: Article 3

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 8785/11-15, which schools are in breach of Article 3 Subsection 7 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005.

**(AQW 9375/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** I understand that this question relates to Article 7 of the Education (NI) Order 1996, as substituted by Article 3 of SENDO.

Subject to specified exemptions, Article 7 of the Education (NI) Order 1996, as substituted by Article 3 of SENDO states that children without statements of SEN should be educated in an ordinary school.

The Chief Executive of Western Education and Library Board has confirmed that Belmont House and Rossmar special schools are currently in breach of Article 7.

### Education and Skills Authority: Timescale

**Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made in relation to the Education and Skills Authority to date; and for a timescale for when it will take over the role that is currently carried out by the Education and Library Boards.

**(AQW 9377/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Subject to Executive agreement, I intend to introduce a Bill in the Assembly in the very near future. The Education and Skills Authority will be established on 1 April 2013.

### Foreign Language Qualifications

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Education for his Department's assessment of (i) the foreign language qualifications of school leavers; and (ii) how the level of foreign language qualifications impacts on (a) the potential for attracting foreign investment; and (b) opportunities for employment in Europe-wide organisations.

**(AQW 9410/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** My Department has not carried out any assessment of the foreign language qualifications of school leavers. However, it has commissioned a report containing recommendations that might inform a modern languages strategy and has received a final draft of that report from the QUB/UU Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies. The

commission envisaged a wide ranging report that would focus on the place of language learning not just in schools but for the economy and for society more generally.

Recognising that it will contain recommendations for other Ministers, I intend in the first instance to circulate the final draft report to Ministerial colleagues. As Education Minister I will also be looking carefully, within the resources available to me, at how best to move forward on those recommendations that are focused on the teaching and learning of modern languages in schools.

The tables below indicate the qualifications in languages taken for 2009/10 and 2010/11.

|                    | Total GCSE Entries |               |
|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|
|                    | 2009/10            | 2010/11       |
| Irish1             | 1,657              | 1,656         |
| Dutch              |                    | *             |
| French             | 7,100              | 6,510         |
| German             | 1,251              | 1,044         |
| Italian            | 26                 | 30            |
| Portuguese         | *                  | 6             |
| Spanish            | 3,113              | 3,342         |
| Arabic             | 6                  | *             |
| Chinese            | 12                 | 13            |
| Polish             | 48                 | 49            |
| Russian            | 15                 | 27            |
| Persian            |                    | *             |
| Urdu               | *                  |               |
| Classical Greek    | *                  | 12            |
| Latin              | 120                | 91            |
| <b>Table Total</b> | <b>13,355</b>      | <b>12,783</b> |

|                 | Total GCE Entries |         |
|-----------------|-------------------|---------|
|                 | 2009/10           | 2010/11 |
| Irish1          | 334               | 319     |
| Dutch           | *                 |         |
| French          | 707               | 562     |
| German          | 153               | 113     |
| Italian         |                   | *       |
| Portuguese      | *                 | *       |
| Spanish         | 443               | 461     |
| Bengali         |                   | *       |
| Chinese         | 26                | 30      |
| Polish          | 12                | 21      |
| Russian         | *                 | 6       |
| Turkish         |                   | *       |
| Classical Greek | *                 | *       |

|                    | Total GCE Entries |              |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|
|                    | 2009/10           | 2010/11      |
| Latin              | 20                | 19           |
| <b>Table Total</b> | <b>1,700</b>      | <b>1,540</b> |

**Notes**

**Source:** RM Data Solutions databases

1 = Excludes Gaeilge

\* = fewer than 5 cases

Excludes special and independent schools

GCSE data excludes short courses

Data are presented at subject level. Pupils may, therefore appear in more than 1 category

**Woodland: UK Forestry Standard**

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Education whether all the bodies or organisations within his Department's remit which own woodland are compliant with the UK Forestry Standard, including his Department, any arm's-length body and any organisation to which his Department provides grant aid.

**(AQW 9416/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Department does not own any woodland. The Education and Library Boards, the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools, N I Council for Integrated Education and the Middletown Centre for Autism have confirmed that they comply with UK Forestry Standards. It was not possible, within the required timescale, to obtain information from all organisations that receive grant aid from the Department (for example voluntary and grant maintained schools that would have had to be contacted on an individual basis).

While the Boards and other relevant Arms Length Bodies do not own large woodland areas they do apply a responsible tree management system for trees within the schools' estate, ensuring any work is carried out by suitably qualified experienced tree surgeons.

**Academic Selection**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact of an education system and the economic consequences for the labour force, where academic selection divides children into two groups at the age of 11.

**(AQW 9419/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** A well educated and highly skilled workforce is essential to the growth of any economy, and in a highly competitive world facing very challenging economic times our workforce is our most important resource. High quality education must be a key factor in growing our economy. We need to ensure that our education system can both improve life opportunities for all our young people through promoting qualifications that are relevant to the changing world of work, and that it can supply our local economy with an appropriately skilled workforce.

Unfortunately our current system of dividing children at age 11 is not meeting the needs of either the economy or our young people. While I strongly support a move away from academic selection I believe that there are key policies which can provide a firm platform for improved outcomes for our children. These include the revised curriculum, which places greater emphasis on developing the skills children need - what they can do and not just what they know and understand; the school improvement policy, Every School a Good School; the literacy and numeracy strategy, Count, Read, Succeed. All of these policies aim to equip all children with the skills for both life and work.

Rejecting children at age 11 not only fails those children, but it fails to maximise the potential of the whole of our workforce. Selective schools are having to adjust to a wider range of academic ability but they are not adjusting to a wider range of social backgrounds: on average just 7% of pupils in our grammar schools are entitled to free school meals compared to 27% in non-selective schools. We need to move away from academic selection and rejection, informed by the experiences of those high performing systems around the world where academic selection and rejection has no place in a school admissions policy. Removing educational disadvantage in all its forms will make our education system better for all pupils and can only serve to benefit the economy and society in general.

Following the publication of the results of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, a BBC report in October 2011 highlighted how the education performance in Shanghai and Hong Kong "seems to be as spectacular as the country's breakneck economic expansion". While this achievement cannot be attributed to one particular feature of the education system I note with interest that among other changes Shanghai "got rid of the "key schools" system which concentrated resources only on top students and elite schools." The report suggests that education reforms in Shanghai which resulted in a system that focuses on the majority, not an elite minority, have been a factor in the economic success of the city.

If our economy is to thrive and grow we need to ensure that we value all our young people and make the most of their varying abilities. We cannot focus just on success for a minority, at the expense of the welfare of the majority. We will remain in the doldrums as an economy unless we educate all our young people to the best of their ability and not imagine that a minority will suffice.

### Preschool Places: Antrim

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Education, in light of the demand for funded pre-school places at Tannaghmore Community Playgroup, Antrim and the over-subscription at St Comgall's Playgroup and St Joseph's Nursery, Antrim, what steps he intends to take (i) to introduce funded places at Tannaghmore Community Playgroup; and (ii) to ensure that each child in the local area receives a funded place.

**(AQW 9423/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) has advised that within the Antrim council area there are currently two statutory nursery and 15 voluntary/private sector settings providing funded places under the Department's Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP).

The application process for admission to funded pre-school settings for the 2012/13 school year is currently underway. As this preference based, two-stage process unfolds providers in the voluntary/private sector continue to liaise with the Board requesting additional places to meet demand in their areas.

Tannaghmore Community Playgroup has expressed an interest in joining the PSEEP in September 2012 and this request remains under consideration by the NEELB PEAG.

The Board will continue to liaise with providers as the admissions process continues and will consider bringing new groups into the PSEEP where no alternative provision is available or in areas of greatest shortfall to ensure that sufficient places are available for target age children in the area.

### Hospitality: Spend

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 8072/11-15, whether the figures provided include his Department's arm's-length bodies; and if not, to provide this information for each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9471/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The response to AQW 8072/11-15 does not include the Department's arm's-length bodies. The amount spent on hospitality by the Department's arm-length bodies in the last five years is shown on the following table.

| Financial year | £'000 |
|----------------|-------|
| 2006-07 *      | 573   |
| 2007-08 *      | 645   |
| 2008-09 *      | 709   |
| 2009-10        | 755   |
| 2010-11        | 538   |

\* One Education and Library Board states it is unable to supply the full cost of hospitality, as defined by the Department, for these years as this information is not readily available from their financial systems.

### Academic Selection

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education how achievement in school correlates with economic growth; and what analysis his Department has carried out, or is aware of, on the effect of academic selection on economic output and the production of an adequate workforce to meet economic demands.

**(AQW 9479/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** A well educated and highly skilled workforce is essential to the growth of any economy, and in a highly competitive world facing very challenging economic times our workforce is our most important resource. High quality education must be a key factor in growing our economy. We need to ensure that our education system can both improve life opportunities for all our young people through promoting qualifications that are relevant to the changing world of work, and that it can supply our local economy with an appropriately skilled workforce.

Unfortunately our current system of dividing children at age 11 is not meeting the needs of either the economy or our young people. While I strongly support a move away from academic selection I believe that there are key policies which can provide a firm platform for improved outcomes for our children. These include the revised curriculum, which places greater emphasis on developing the skills children need - what they can do and not just what they know and understand; the school improvement policy, Every School a Good School; the literacy and numeracy strategy, Count, Read, Succeed. All of these policies aim to equip all children with the skills for both life and work.

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If our economy is to thrive and grow we need to ensure that we value all our young people and make the most of their varying abilities. We cannot focus just on success for a minority, at the expense of the welfare of the majority. We will remain in the doldrums as an economy unless we educate all our young people to the best of their ability and not imagine that a minority will suffice.

### Schools: Asbestos

**Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 8828/11-15, in how many (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools in each Education and Library Board area asbestos is present.

**(AQW 9488/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** As a result of the introduction of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003 and the Control of Asbestos (NI Order) 2007 the Education and Library Boards arranged for asbestos assessments to be carried out on the schools' estate to ascertain the extent of asbestos containing materials present. Any asbestos containing materials that were identified during assessments as being 'high risk' were removed following the assessment.

As you will be aware from my previous correspondence, it is Government policy that, so long as asbestos is in good condition and is unlikely to be disturbed, it is better to be managed for the remaining life of the school rather than to disturb it.

The table below details the numbers of schools in the estate (excluding those in the Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated sectors) in which asbestos is present:

|                     | BELB | SEELB | NEELB | SELB | WELB |
|---------------------|------|-------|-------|------|------|
| Primary School      | 65   | 106   | 168   | 202  | 163  |
| Post Primary School | 13   | 23    | 33    | 35   | 28   |

DE circular No 2003/20 gives advice to the sectors and schools on the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003. The DE circular is to be updated shortly to reflect any changes required as a result of revisions to the Regulations.

### Schools Audit: Data

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education why the schools audit used exam results from 2008 and 2009 rather than results from 2010 and 2011.

**(AQW 9492/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The viability audit included data for the 2008/09 and 2009/10 school years as the data for 2010/11 had not been verified at the time of the audit and were still subject to minor changes. It was therefore considered prudent to use 2009/10, the latest year for which fully verified data were available, as the final year for the performance element of the exercise.

### Media Communications Protocols

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education what media communications protocols exist between his Department and each of its arm's-length bodies; and to publish these protocols.

**(AQW 9595/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** No media communications protocols exist between my Department and any of its arm's-length bodies.

### Schools: Viability and Attainment Issues

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Education how he intends to encourage schools in the controlled, maintained and integrated sectors to work together on an area basis to overcome viability and attainment issues.

**(AQW 9618/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** I have made it clear that my focus is on raising standards and, against the backdrop of an extremely challenging financial landscape in the coming years that progress on reshaping the structure and pattern of education provision cannot be

delayed. I have therefore commissioned the Education and Library Boards, in association with CCMS and engaging fully with the other school sectors, to develop strategic plans on an area basis.

The Terms of Reference for this area planning process require the development of a network of viable and sustainable schools that can deliver the revised curriculum and the Entitlement Framework. Each area plan will cover the entirety of primary and post-primary provision within a Board area and in drawing up the agreed plans, the Boards should (among other things) identify realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross-sectoral basis.

### Schools: Viability Audits

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Education (i) why the enrolment numbers used in the viability audits did not include all children with special educational needs and children who have been statemented; and (ii) what is the impact of this on the viability audits. **(AQW 9624/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The aim of the Viability Audit was to assess the viability of mainstream primary and post-primary schools. The enrolment numbers used reflected pupils enrolled in mainstream schools, including those with special educational needs and those with statements.

The Sustainable Schools policy does not apply to Special Education provision including that provided in special education units attached to mainstream schools. It is therefore entirely appropriate to exclude pupils in such units when assessing the viability of mainstream schools.

As you will be aware the Viability Audit is the first step towards area planning and it is the intention that area plans will identify the needs of all pupils in an area and make proposals to meet these needs, including special education provision both in mainstream and stand alone Special Schools.

### Roan St Patrick's Primary School: Capacity

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Education what is his Department's position on increasing the capacity of Roan St Patrick's Primary School, Eglisish. **(AQW 9729/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** I am aware of the issues at Roan St Patrick's Primary School Eglisish, as I recently visited the school.

As you will be aware, I have commissioned the five ELBs and CCMS, working with the other sectors, to co-ordinate a strategic area planning process to shape the future pattern of education delivery. This may point to the growth of particular schools in an area and may change schools' admissions and enrolment numbers. These will be considered as part of any strategic plans which the Boards produce.

## Department for Employment and Learning

### Disciplinary Action: DEL Staff

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of staff disciplinary actions taken by his Department in each of the last two years, at Staff Officer level and above, including details of the offence and the disciplinary sanctions applied.

**(AQW 9185/11-15)**

**Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):** Details of the number of staff disciplinary actions taken by the Department for Employment and Learning in each of the last two years at Staff Officer level and above are set out in the table below.

| Year | Number of cases | Details of offence   | Disciplinary Action taken |
|------|-----------------|--|---------------------------|
| 2010 | 0               | N/A  | N/A                       |
| 2011 | 1               | Misconduct of any kind that may have an adverse effect on the working of Departments | Formal Warning            |

### Apprenticeships

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprenticeships have been created in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency.

**(AQW 9204/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The ApprenticeshipsNI programme is an employer-led provision and, as such, it is employers and not my Department that create apprenticeship positions. The data at Annex A details the number of apprentices who started on ApprenticeshipsNI for each of the last three years broken down by Parliamentary constituency.



**Annex A****Number of individuals who have commenced Apprenticeships, 2009-2011 by Parliamentary Constituency**

|    | <b>Parliamentary Constituency</b> | <b>2009</b> | <b>2010</b> | <b>2011</b> | <b>Totals</b> |
|----|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1  | Belfast East                      | 246         | 243         | 107         | 596           |
| 2  | Belfast North                     | 336         | 401         | 607         | 1344          |
| 3  | Belfast South                     | 547         | 603         | 738         | 1888          |
| 4  | Belfast West                      | 1813        | 1573        | 2502        | 5888          |
| 5  | East Antrim                       | 254         | 567         | 248         | 1069          |
| 6  | East Londonderry                  | 349         | 377         | 458         | 1184          |
| 7  | Fermanagh and South Tyrone        | 235         | 396         | 469         | 1100          |
| 8  | Foyle                             | 305         | 559         | 582         | 1446          |
| 9  | Lagan Valley                      | 105         | 89          | 120         | 314           |
| 10 | Mid Ulster                        | 72          | 70          | 97          | 239           |
| 11 | Newry and Armagh                  | 815         | 757         | 830         | 2402          |
| 12 | North Antrim                      | 506         | 503         | 491         | 1500          |
| 13 | North Down                        | 77          | 290         | 289         | 656           |
| 14 | South Antrim                      | 542         | 638         | 969         | 2149          |
| 15 | South Down                        | 195         | 84          | 92          | 371           |
| 16 | Strangford                        | 51          | 45          | 97          | 193           |
| 17 | Upper Bann                        | 91          | 176         | 241         | 508           |
| 18 | West Tyrone                       | 737         | 961         | 696         | 2394          |
| 19 | Others [Outside NI]               | 21          | 19          | 0           | 40            |
|    | <b>Total</b>                      | <b>7297</b> | <b>8351</b> | <b>9633</b> | <b>25281</b>  |

**Wind Farms: Training**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department has taken to meet the needs of the growing demand for skills in the designing, manufacturing and installation of off-shore wind farms, particularly in terms of health and safety requirements such as the Minimum Industry Safety Training Standard, the OPITO approved standard, the Client Contractor National Safety Group Safety Passport and helicopter dunk tests.

**(AQW 9351/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The Department is funding the further education sector's Carbon Zero NI project, through its Employer Support Programme. The project aims to position the sector as an engine for the development of smart, innovative sustainable technologies in the areas of clean energy, including wind energy.

Additionally, under the Department's Assured Skills and Customised Training programmes, two Belfast Metropolitan College lecturers have been upskilled to deliver Level 2 and Level 3 NVQ Wind Turbine Maintenance courses. As a result, the college is currently delivering Wind Turbine Maintenance Training to eleven employees in this field, and has created additional capacity that is likely to be of interest to local companies and potential new investors in this sector.

The Department does not fund any statutory health and safety training; such training is the responsibility of individual employers.

A number of further education colleges offer health and safety training on a full cost recovery basis for employers, as detailed below:

**South Eastern Regional College**

- Minimum Industry Safety Training Standard;
- OPITO-approved Standard; and
- Client Contractor National Safety Group Safety Passport.

**South West College**

- a range of health and safety courses (to British Wind Energy Association standards).

**Belfast Metropolitan College**

- a range of health and safety courses, tailored to meet the needs of individual employers in the Offshore Renewable Energy sector.

**Confucius Institute: One China Policy**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether, at the time of the establishment of the Confucius Institute, anyone from his Department or the University of Ulster was required to sign a contract in support of the One China Policy.

**(AQW 9522/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The agreement to establish the Confucius Institute for Northern Ireland at the University of Ulster was signed on 14 July 2011 in Beijing by the Director-General of the Chinese Language Council International (Hanban), Mme Lin Xu, and the University of Ulster's Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Richard Barnett. No part of the agreement signed by the University makes any reference whatsoever to the 'One China' policy, nor was anyone involved asked to support that or any other Chinese policy. Similarly, no official from my department was required to sign a contract in support of the 'One China' policy.

**South West Regional College: Student Places**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail how many additional (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time student places are needed in the South West Regional College to meet demand; and what steps his Department is taking to address this issue.

**(AQW 9555/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** Further Education Colleges are funded through the recurrent block grant for the delivery of Further Education (FE) provision up to and including level 3, Higher Education delivered in FE (HE in FE) and Essential Skills provision. Funding allocations and delivery targets for each college are negotiated and agreed through the annual College Development Plan (CDP) process where each college presents to the Department a curriculum plan in line with my Department's strategic objectives, whilst reflecting demand and local economic and community needs. The CDP process is currently underway in respect of 2012/13 and, consequently, no decisions on enrolment numbers and the volume of provision to be delivered have yet been made. Any decisions made, will be informed by historical delivery trends, evidence presented within the CDP and will be subject to resource constraints.

**Construction Industry Workers: Employability**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what specific measures or programmes have been put in place to boost the employability and skills of former construction industry workers who are now in receipt of unemployment benefits.

**(AQW 9558/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** As a direct response to the economic downturn, contingency arrangements were introduced in November 2008 to allow apprentices who were made redundant in the construction, engineering and motor vehicle sectors to continue their training via the Department's Steps to Work programme.

Specific measures included the opportunity for apprentices over the age of 18 years to join the Steps to Work programme for up to a maximum of 52 weeks and to complete the Technical Certificate and Essential Skills element at a Further Education College if required. Apprentices under the age of 18 years can transfer to the Programme-Led apprenticeship under Training for Success.

My Department's Careers Service also provides an impartial, all-age careers information, advice and guidance service to clients throughout Northern Ireland. This service is free and available to everyone, including former construction industry workers, and is delivered by professionally qualified careers advisers.

Careers advisers work with clients on a one to one basis to help them access and analyse appropriate information about current and future employment opportunities, determine the occupations that best suit their personal aptitudes, interests and skills, identify relevant training and develop appropriate career plans.

**Media Communications Protocols**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what media communications protocols exist between his Department and each of its arm's-length bodies; and to publish these protocols.

**(AQW 9590/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** No media communications protocols exist between the Department for Employment and Learning and each of its arm's length bodies.

## Medical and Nursing Graduates

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people graduated from universities in Northern Ireland with a (i) medical; and (ii) nursing degree in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9620/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The number of students who have graduated from universities in Northern Ireland with a (i) medical; and (ii) nursing degree in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below:

| Subject  | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Medicine | 285     | 260     | 290     | 345     | 410     |
| Nursing  | 1,870   | 1,910   | 1,845   | 1,575   | 1,500   |

**Source:** Higher Education Statistics Agency

### Notes:

- 1 Figures in the table are rounded to the nearest 5.
- 2 The figures include graduates from both postgraduate and undergraduate courses.
- 3 Medical graduates include those students who studied clinical medicine or pre-clinical medicine courses.
- 4 The latest year for which qualifications data are available is 2010/11.

## Child Poverty Strategy Delivery Plan

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what actions his Department has identified as being within its remit in developing the Child Poverty Strategy Delivery Plan.

**(AQO 1578/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** One of the most effective ways of addressing child poverty is supporting people/parents to move into work.

My Department's actions will therefore focus on the following areas:

- supporting people/parents to move into work;
- raising the skill levels of individuals; and
- up-skilling those in work to improve earning capacity.

My Department is currently undertaking a range of actions which support these three areas. These include:

- leading on the development of a cross-departmental strategy for those young people Not in Education, Employment or Training;
- essential skills provision to raise literacy, numeracy and ICT skills;
- increasing the proportion of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds that are engaged in Higher Education;
- the provision of a range of employment support services, including job search facilities and employment programmes;
- putting in place more effective careers support through Partnership Agreements with key partners such as schools, Health and Social Care Trusts and those who act as advocates for young people with barriers; and
- undertaking research projects to investigate best practice in relation to careers guidance for people with a disability and those with other social barriers.

Discussions are continuing, led by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, on agreeing the precise content of the Delivery Plan.

## Skills Strategy: Update

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the implementation of the Skills Strategy.

**(AQO 1582/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** Skills are a crucial element in rebalancing and rebuilding the Northern Ireland economy and I am fully committed to driving forward work on a wide front in order to improve the skills profile of our workforce.

The aim of my Department's overarching Skills Strategy – 'Success through Skills – Transforming Futures' - is to enable people to access and progress up the skills ladder, in order to:

- raise the skills level of the whole workforce;
- raise productivity;
- increase levels of social inclusion by enhancing the employability of those currently excluded from the labour market; and
- secure Northern Ireland's future in a global marketplace.

The broad aims and objectives of the Skills Strategy are being taken forward through a number of Departmental strategies including 'Further Education means Business', 'Preparing for Success', 'Leading to Success' and 'Success through STEM'.

Another very important aspect of the ongoing implementation of the Skills Strategy is how my Department will work with business over the coming years to encourage them to buy in to the skills agenda and see merit in investing in the skills of their workforce. To this end, I have recently published the Department's 'Employer Engagement Plan'.

The Plan sets out how we will make it easier for local businesses to:

- up-skill their existing workforce;
- have the excellent training they offer in house accredited;
- have the existing skills of staff recognised; and
- better utilise these skills within their workforce.

The Employer Engagement Plan includes twenty projects and initiatives that will be delivered predominantly over the next eighteen months. Through these initiatives and the implementation of the overall Skills Strategy we plan to make real progress towards ensuring that we have the skilled people necessary to avail of current and future economic opportunities.

### **University of Ulster: Job Losses**

**Mr McClarty** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many job losses are expected at each University of Ulster campus following the announcement of a rolling programme of job losses over four years.

**(AQO 1584/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** Staffing at the University of Ulster is a matter for the University itself. In the current comprehensive spending review period, all higher education institutions have been required to make efficiency savings of 6% in the current and next academic year.

It is for individual institutions to decide how to implement these efficiencies and, if necessary, to determine where any resulting job losses will occur.

### **Students: North/South Flows**

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the main barriers to greater North-South student flows.

**(AQO 1587/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** Members will be aware of the IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council Report published last August and will recall that I welcomed the report in this chamber as an opportunity to explore any factors that restrict students in their choice of academic institution.

The report made nine key recommendations to improve North-South undergraduate student flows. Whilst some identified causes are likely to be beyond the control of either government, a number of issues relevant to my Department include student support and registration fee arrangements for students from Northern Ireland attending universities in the Republic of Ireland and A-level and Leaving Certificate equivalences.

The subject of financial support for Northern Ireland undergraduate students studying in the Republic of Ireland is currently under review by my Department. The issues surrounding A-level and Leaving Certificate equivalences are the basis of ongoing discussion between the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment and the Irish Universities Association

In addition, following the publication of the report, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation has proposed the establishment of a forum to discuss the outcomes and I have agreed that my Department will be represented there.

I believe that students from Northern Ireland should continue to have a free choice of academic institution within the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland and elsewhere. I also recognise the important role played by students from the Republic of Ireland in contributing to the vibrant and multi-national atmosphere of campuses throughout Northern Ireland.

The strengthening of access to education on an all-island basis will be considered in the Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland currently being developed by my Department.

### **NEETs: Cross-departmental Working**

**Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many times NEETs Branch staff have met with relevant personnel in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

**(AQO 1589/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** Discussions have taken place specifically on the issue of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training at two meetings with officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, at eight meetings with officials from the Department of Education and at six meetings with officials from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Discussions also took place with other Departmental officials during consultation seminars, at Invest NI and at a Young Persons' consultation in June 2011.

The issue has also been discussed within the context of cross-departmental meetings on issues such as Investing for Health, child poverty, care leavers, and at children's and young persons fora including the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People.

These discussions are in addition to correspondence that took place by telephone and e-mail.

## Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

### Export Finance: Support for Small Businesses

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support is available for small businesses that are affected by foreign Governments which have suspended payments to local companies.

**(AQW 7946/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):** The UK Export Finance (the arm of the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills) can provide advice and support towards insuring UK investors in overseas markets and UK exporters against non-payment by their overseas buyers. This support is available to Northern Ireland firms via BIS's Export Credit Guarantee Department.

### Arms Trade: Financial Support

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 6196/11-15 (i) which arms companies received financial assistance from InvestNI for the period March 2005 to January 2012; (ii) how much funding each company received; (iii) how the funding from InvestNI was spent by each company; and (iv) what products each of these companies developed, or were planning to develop, as a result of this financial assistance.

**(AQW 8909/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** One company in Northern Ireland, Thales Air Defence Limited, which is engaged in the design, development and manufacture of short-range air defence products, received financial assistance from Invest Northern Ireland during the period 1 March 2005 to 31 January 2012.

Below is a summary of the amounts of financial assistance paid, how the Invest NI financial assistance was spent and the products developed or being developed as a result of the financial assistance.

| Date of Offer | Type of Assistance             | Total Amount Paid between 1 March 2005 and 31 January 2012 | How Invest NI funding was spent.  |
|---------------|--------------------------------|--|---|
| March 2005    | Selective Financial Assistance | £356,000   | Used to improve technological efficiency and to retain and develop core manufacturing skills. |
| December 2009 | Research & Development         | £3,286,728   | Research into strategic technologies for high precision guidance systems                      |
| January 2012  | Research & Development         | NIL  | To extend capability in the development of open architectures for existing defence systems.   |

### Arms Trade: Financial Support

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 6196/11-15, to detail (i) the information each of the companies provided to InvestNI to secure the funding; and (ii) the application process followed by each of the companies to receive this funding.

**(AQW 9123/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:**

- (i) In accordance with normal procedures governing the provision of financial assistance under Invest NI's schemes, the company supported was required to submit a business plan or application form detailing the commercial rationale associated with each project along with appropriate justification of the need for financial assistance.
- (ii) The business plan for each project was subjected to a commercial appraisal; and approval of Invest NI financial assistance was given at the appropriate level and in accordance with the criteria applicable to Invest NI's Selective Financial Assistance and Grant for R&D schemes.

## Defence/Security Sector: Financial Support

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the funding, grants or other support that her Department or its arm's-length bodies have provided to companies in the defence or security sector in each of the last ten years; and for what project or work the funding was provided.

**(AQW 9199/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The information requested is provided in the table below:

| Financial Year | Offers | New jobs | Safe Jobs | Total Assistance | Total Planned Investment | Reason for Provision of Assistance   |
|----------------|--------|----------|-----------|------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 2002-03        | 1      | 0        | 0         | £899,060         | £4,495,300               | Research and Development Project   |
| 2003-04        | 4      | 0        | 0         | £4,353           | £4,353                   | Business and skills development projects.  |
| 2004-05        | 8      | 5        | 67        | £3,866,587       | £11,462,506              | Research and Development, SFA expansion, management information systems, business improvement and skills development and export growth Projects. |
| 2005-06        | 5      | 0        | 0         | £33,088          | £64,095                  | Research and development, business improvement and export growth projects.   |
| 2006-07        | 7      | 52       | 4         | £975,188         | £7,473,073               | Research and Development, SFA expansion, management information systems, product development and energy efficiency Projects.                     |
| 2007-08        | 9      | 14       | 0         | £368,525         | £2,505,425               | Research and Development, management information systems, business improvement and skills development and export growth Projects.                |
| 2008-09        | 7      | 0        | 0         | £146,948         | £286,316                 | Research and Development, innovation focused, business improvement and skills development and product development Projects.                      |
| 2009-10        | 17     | 11       | 0         | £3,780,545       | £9,386,400               | Research and Development, capital expansion, business improvement and skills development, Trade and export growth Projects.                      |
| 2010-11        | 30     | 21       | 0         | £297,939         | £1,683,517               | Research and Development, capital expansion, business improvement and skills development, Trade and export growth Projects.                      |

## City of Culture: Tourism Support

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what degree of priority Tourism officials will give to supporting events in and around 2013 as Londonderry celebrates its status as the first UK City of Culture.

**(AQW 9221/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** NITB has been supporting the City Council in Londonderry and ILEX in the run up to 2013, to ensure the City can develop an exciting and comprehensive events programme for 2013. NITB has committed £700,000 towards the UK City of Culture programme of events, subject to the necessary approval. In addition NITB's Tourism Events Fund will open again in the

autumn of 2012 to which projects in the area can apply. NITB will be working with the Culture Company to develop and align marketing and communications plans for 2013.

Tourism Ireland's new three-year global advertising campaign will reach over 200 million consumers in 2012 alone and has been developed to be flexible and adaptable and will evolve over its three-year lifespan to capitalise on events such as Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013. Tourism Ireland is already promoting Londonderry worldwide in advance of the arrival in July of the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race and events such as the Peace One Day concert at Ebrington Barracks in June, marking the opening of the London 2012 Festival and Paralympic Games.

Tourism Ireland's programme of trade and familiarisation visits to Londonderry continues and in relation to business tourism, Tourism Ireland will sponsor the annual conference of the Association of British Professional Conference Organisers (ABPCO) which will take place in Londonderry in 2013.

### **Our Time, Our Place: Advertising Budget**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the 'Our Time Our Place' initiative has been advertised in (i) Northern Ireland; (ii) other parts of the UK; and (iii) the rest of the world; and what budget was allocated to each campaign. **(AQW 9224/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** ni2012 is a major opportunity to capitalise on a series of significant events and anniversaries to create a platform which will reposition Northern Ireland as a positive place to live, work, invest, study and visit. A marketing strategy, for the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland marketplaces, including both an extensive campaign and the innovative use of digital and social media is currently taking place.

To date £832,000 has been invested in the domestic campaign in Northern Ireland and £1.32 million in the Republic of Ireland marketplace.

Tourism Ireland, which markets Northern Ireland worldwide, has invested £4.7 million specifically for marketing ni2012. The majority of this money will be spent in Great Britain, which is our most important market. £1 million of this investment has been invested in co-operative marketing campaigns with air and sea carriers.

Other overseas activity to promote ni2012 includes TV advertising on British terrestrial and satellite channels, a major promotional roadshow series in key access gateways such as London, Manchester and Glasgow and participation in trade and consumer travel shows in France, Spain and Germany.

### **Presbyterian Mutual Society: DETI Spend**

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) why her Department is engaging senior legal figures from outside Northern Ireland in seeking the disqualification of the Directors of the Presbyterian Mutual Society; (ii) how much her Department has spent to date on this; and (iii) for an estimate of the final costs. **(AQW 9234/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Department has engaged Counsel both from England and Northern Ireland, experienced in the field, to advise and represent it in the disqualification proceedings. To date, the fees incurred have been £6985.13 inclusive of VAT. The proceedings are not yet listed for hearing and it is not possible at this stage to give an estimate of the costs which will be incurred.

### **Presbyterian Mutual Society: Directors**

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what factors her Department assess to decide which Directors of the Presbyterian Mutual Society should be disqualified. **(AQW 9236/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** This is a live issue in relation to proceedings currently before the Court and it is therefore not appropriate to comment on PMS at this time.

DETI has a statutory obligation, following receipt of an Administrator's report, to consider whether disqualification proceedings should be commenced against any director of a company which has become insolvent. The Department must consider whether it is expedient in the public interest to initiate such proceedings under article 10 of the Company Directors Disqualification (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. It is a matter for the High Court, not the Department, to determine whether a disqualification order should be made. If the Court is satisfied that the conduct of a director is such as to make him unfit to be concerned in the management of a company, then it must make such an order.

The concept of the public interest is incapable of precise formulation. It is a question of judgement in any given case and will involve consideration of a number of factors including the purpose of the legislation (the main purpose being protection of the public), the nature of the allegations at issue, the directors responsibility in respect of such allegations together with any aggravating or mitigating factors and the prospects of success of proceedings should they issue. The Department reviews the position throughout the course of proceedings.

## Hospitality: Spend

**Mr Allister** asked Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 6316/11-15, whether the figures provided include the Department's arm's-length bodies; and if not, to provide this information for each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9245/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Department's response to AQW 6316/11-15 did not include arms length bodies.

For Invest NI, hospitality expenditure for 2007-08 to 2010-11, and in the year to date was provided in response to AQW 6314/11-15.

The table below provides a breakdown of hospitality expenditure across the Department's other arms length bodies for each of the last five financial years:

|         | <b>Health &amp; Safety Executive<br/>NI<br/>(see note a)</b> | <b>Consumer Council NI (see<br/>note b)</b> | <b>NI Tourist Board</b> |
|---------|--|---|-------------------------|
| 2010-11 | £3,594   | £6,415                                      | £17,200                 |
| 2009-10 | £4,811   | £9,531                                      | £13,362                 |
| 2008-09 | £6,682   | £10,866                                     | £13,562                 |
| 2007-08 | £2,544   | not available                               | £13,704                 |
| 2006-07 | £5,073   | not available                               | £12,419                 |

### Notes:

- (a) HSENI figures represent the programme element of the amount spent on hospitality.
- (b) Consumer Council figures for 2006-07 and 2007-08 are not available without incurring disproportionate cost.

## 'The Shore': Benefits to Tourism

**Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has in place to build on the recent success of 'The Shore' film production, particularly in terms of the potential benefits to the tourism sector in the South Down area.  
**(AQW 9254/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** TV and film are recognised as strong influencers on prospective visitors and often provide the opportunity to promote Northern Ireland as a holiday destination by highlighting the character of our landscapes. The success of The Shore will help lever positive exposure for Northern Ireland around the world. The US media coverage of the success of The Shore at the Oscars has already generated over \$2 million in equivalent advertising value.

Building on this success writer and director Terry George and producer Orlagh George have agreed to feature in footage Tourism Ireland is currently filming at the St Patrick Centre and Down Cathedral for inclusion in its promotional activity overseas. Tourism Ireland is also highlighting The Shore on all of its Social Media channels, including Facebook.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has also included a news story about The Shore on its website [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com) and the South East Ulster/Mourne Mountains region is one of several key destinations NITB promotes both within Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland through its marketing campaigns, website, promotional literature, PR and social media outlets.

## BIS: Ministerial Meetings

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills regarding the trade visits that he has made on behalf of the United Kingdom; and whether Northern Ireland has been represented on any of these visits.

**(AQW 9365/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Some Northern Ireland companies have participated on trade missions facilitated by UK Trade & Investment (UKTI), the organisation that delivers such missions on behalf of the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). However, I understand there has been no Northern Ireland representation on the four occasions that the Secretary of State for BIS has accompanied business delegations overseas.

Invest NI's Chief Executive recently met with the Chief Executive of UKTI and among the matters discussed, it was agreed that both organisations should consider ways in which Northern Ireland might be represented on UKTI missions being led by Westminster Ministers.

Invest NI has its own programme of trade visits overseas and in the period March 2012 to March 2013 there are plans to organise 70 events worldwide.



### Direct Flights: Belfast/Toronto

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she has taken to encourage and secure direct flights between Belfast and Toronto.

**(AQW 9392/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The restoration of a direct service between Toronto and Belfast is a strategic priority for tourism and the broader economy. Tourism Ireland, in cooperation with Belfast International Airport, has continued to case-make for the restoration of a direct service from Toronto to Belfast. Meetings took place with both Air Transat and Air Canada last summer and further meetings will take place this year.

Indirect access from Toronto to Belfast (via New York or London) is currently being highlighted to potential visitors by Tourism Ireland.

### Tourism Ireland: Canada/USA Spend

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how much Tourism Ireland spends on an annual basis in (a) Canada; and (b) the United States; and (ii) how much of this spend is used for promoting Northern Ireland.

**(AQW 9393/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Tourism Ireland has an extensive marketing programme in place in North America for 2012 and will invest approximately £7.2 million in this market this year to promote both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It is not possible to split this spend between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

However, I can confirm that Tourism Ireland will spend £450k on its dedicated ni2012 campaign in North America on co-operative marketing of the Continental Airlines New York/Belfast service, the NI "Home of Champions" golf campaign and specific NI engagement with the tourism trade and consumer promotion.

### Hospitality Trade

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what (i) financial assistance; (ii) advice; and (iii) training her Department or its arm's-length bodies provide for the hospitality trade.

**(AQW 9394/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Hospitality businesses can access an extensive range of assistance via my Department's arm's length bodies - the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), Invest NI and Tourism Ireland. Examples of assistance provided to hospitality businesses include:

- NITB grant aid via the Tourism Development Scheme and Events Fund; NITB's Industry Development Programme (including Masterclasses and Learning Journeys); participation in an accommodation Quality Assurance Scheme; and a broad range of NITB advice such as start up guidance for B&B providers, signposting to initiatives and training opportunities, the provision of guidance on the development of sustainable tourism and green accreditation schemes;
- Invest NI grant support for qualifying tourist accommodation projects; Invest NI advice and financial support for qualifying businesses to help improve business processes, skills development and training, marketing, e-commerce, knowledge management, energy efficiency and environmental practices; and
- Tourism Ireland's assistance in helping to promote hospitality businesses in 22 markets overseas, including attendance at overseas consumer and trade fairs, co-operative marketing opportunities, features in consumer and business tourism ezines and publicity opportunities.

### Financial Capability Strategy

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether he plans to introduce a strategic framework to improve consumers' basic financial knowledge.

**(AQW 9399/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The final Programme for Government 2011-15 includes an Executive commitment to develop and implement a Financial Capability Strategy for consumers under Priority 2, Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage, and Improving Health and Wellbeing. The aim of the Financial Capability Strategy will be to equip consumers with the skills and knowledge to manage their finances effectively.

### Woodland: UK Forestry Standard

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether all the bodies or organisations within her Department's remit which own woodland are compliant with the UK Forestry Standard, including her Department, any arm's-length body and any organisation to which her Department provides grant aid.

**(AQW 9436/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Of DETI's four Non Departmental Public Bodies, only Invest NI own land. Invest NI owns the freehold of 2830 acres of industrial land across Northern Ireland, which includes landscaped and woodland areas. The vast majority of this land has been let and lease conditions place the responsibility for retention and maintenance of trees within landscaping on the tenant and provides the right of inspection and challenge for Invest NI. Vacant land is regularly inspected, to ensure that it is free of

trespass and maintained to a high level. Invest NI works in partnership with Planning NI, its professional service providers and various environmental agencies to ensure that biodiversity and sustainability are taken into account when planning maintenance and development works.

It is not possible to provide information on organisations to which DETI provides grant aid as this data is not held centrally.

### **Foresight Unit**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the timescale for the establishment of the Foresight Unit to identify emerging sectors and their specific skills needs.

**(AQO 1585/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** DETI's new Foresight Unit is already in place and is working with MATRIX to identify emerging high technology market priorities and opportunities. Its first study will be into the sustainable energy sector and will be published by the autumn. The unit has also engaged at national level with the UK's BIS' Foresight team and is now a partner in "UK Future of Manufacturing" study. As it develops its work programme the unit will also engage with businesses in other sectors to identify emerging markets and opportunities across the whole economy.

### **Gas Network: Expansion**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has urged the gas industry to expand the gas network; and to which towns specifically.

**(AQW 9524/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The majority of responses to my Department's 2011 consultation paper on extension of the natural gas network in Northern Ireland, particularly those from the natural gas sector, local industry and the public sector, supported extending the natural gas network and agreed that the areas outlined in the consultation, i.e. the main towns in the West and North West of Northern Ireland, namely Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Omagh, Enniskillen/Derrylin and Strabane, and towns in East Down such as Saintfield, Ballynahinch, Crossgar and Downpatrick represent the key remaining areas in which the natural gas network might feasibly be developed.

Following the consultation, my officials have been having discussions with the Utility Regulator in relation to how best to take forward gas network extension. As part of this work, I plan to complete a detailed economic analysis covering the costs and benefits of extending the network to the above areas.

### **Gas Network: Viability**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which towns are the most economically viable for inclusion in an extended gas network.

**(AQW 9525/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Responses to my 2011 consultation on extension of the natural gas network noted overall support from the energy industry and the wider community for bringing gas to the new areas outlined in the consultation paper, i.e. the main towns in the West and North West of Northern Ireland, namely Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Omagh, Enniskillen/Derrylin and Strabane, and towns in East Down such as Saintfield, Ballynahinch, Crossgar and Downpatrick.

I now plan to complete a further detailed economic analysis which will consider the costs and benefits of the proposed extension.

### **Gas Network: East Antrim**

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any suppliers of natural gas have indicated a desire to provide natural gas to areas of East Antrim which they currently do not serve, such as Glenarm, Carnlough and the Glens.

**(AQW 9580/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** I am not aware of any plans by natural gas companies to take gas to Glenarm, Carnlough and the Glens in East Antrim.

Any extension of the gas network must be economically viable, and is very dependent on there being sufficient gas loads in the proposed new areas.

### **Gas Network: Availability**

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the (i) percentage of availability to the gas network in the ten towns licence area; (ii) percentage of homes connected to the gas network within this area that are (a) owner-occupied; and (b) Housing Executive owned; and (iii) projected percentage of availability to the gas network in the ten towns licence area by 2015.

**(AQW 9597/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** firmus energy has advised that approximately 15% of the domestic properties in its 10 Towns gas licensed area have availability to the natural gas network.

firmus energy also advise that some 47% of its domestic customers in the 10 Towns area live in NI Housing Executive properties, with the remaining 53% of domestic customers living in owner-occupied or privately rented properties.

A number of factors will influence the projected percentage of domestic properties with availability to the natural gas network. firmus energy estimate that approximately 25% of domestic properties in their licensed area will have gas available to them by 2015.

### **Wind Turbines: Infrastructure Costs**

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment who pays for the infrastructure to connect wind turbines to the grid.

**(AQW 9602/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The cost of the infrastructure to connect wind turbines to the grid is met by the generating station owner. NIE, as network owner, is required to provide a connection offer to all generation considering connecting to the distribution system in line with its connection charging statement. These costs will include any necessary associated line upgrades required to accommodate the additional power generated.

### **City of Culture: Marketing Campaign**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the plans for a marketing campaign to promote tourism for Derry City of Culture 2013.

**(AQW 9643/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 9221/11-15.

### **Independent News and Media: Job Creation**

**Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs were created at Independent News and Media PLC's Belfast and Newry sites as a result of InvestNI's investment of £3.5 million between 2005 and 2009; and whether any of the funding was used by Independent News and Media PLC for a programme of redundancies.

**(AQW 9686/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI assistance to Independent News and Media from 2005-2009 was £3.66million. The number of jobs associated with the grants was 183.

The grants were paid out against vouched and approved capital expenditure on plant and equipment.

### **Economy: Cross-border Co-operation**

**Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the potential for economic growth and job creation from cross-border economic cooperation.

**(AQO 1596/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** For Northern Ireland, with a small home market, we need to expand our horizons and look across the world to seize trading opportunities. To do this it is vital that local companies establish commercial links with partners outside of our borders. In the new NI Economic Strategy we have increased our target for export growth by 2014/15 from 15% to 20%.

The greatest potential for export led growth, in the coming years, will be in trading with emerging economies, which is why we have introduced a new stretching target in the Economic Strategy to increase our exports to these emerging markets by 60% by 2014/15. I have witnessed this potential myself at Trade Missions across the world, seeing first hand the opportunities for local companies to make new contacts, build alliances and ultimately access new markets.

### **Economic Strategy: Business Investment**

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the help that other Executive colleagues could give to her Department, in terms of policies, to assist in increasing business investment.

**(AQO 1597/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Northern Ireland Economic Strategy was developed by the Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy, and represents a shared commitment across all Departments to improve economic competitiveness and improve employment and prosperity.

The focus of activity is on supporting export-led economic growth making Northern Ireland more attractive for business investment.

I anticipate that the successful cross-departmental approach present during the development of the Strategy will continue throughout implementation.

### **Unemployment: Invest NI Assistance**

**Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why InvestNI has delivered the lowest numbers of jobs in the constituencies with the highest numbers of unemployed and long-term unemployed people.

**(AQO 1598/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The assertion that less jobs are promoted in areas which have higher rates of unemployment is not valid. For example, the Foyle constituency has a relatively high rate of claimant count compared to the Northern Ireland average, but has also received the third highest number of jobs assisted by Invest NI during the past five years. Newry and Armagh, which also has relatively high rates of unemployment, is ranked fourth out of the eighteen Parliamentary Constituency Areas in Northern Ireland in terms of jobs supported by Invest NI. During the past five years almost 60% of new jobs supported by Invest NI were located in areas of economic disadvantage – areas which account for around 30% of the Northern Ireland population.

Invest NI assistance has tended to reflect the concentration of companies in and around our main towns and cities. It is important for our economic growth that companies must be able to locate where they believe they can operate most profitably.

### **Economy: EU Regional Aid**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what impact the Review of EU Regional Aid Guidelines will have on economic development.

**(AQO 1599/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Any steps to further reduce Regional Aid ceilings or coverage in Northern Ireland, through the possible removal by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills of Northern Ireland's automatic assisted area status, will have a significant impact on our ability to support business competitiveness and growth. It is particularly concerning that, while one part of the United Kingdom Government is seeking to rebalance the Northern Ireland economy and grow our private sector, another part is taking steps which will have a significant detrimental effect on our ability to encourage private sector growth. We have raised our concerns with the United Kingdom Government and will continue to do so.

### **Credit Unions: Financial Services Authority**

**Mr Murphy** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there have been any developments in alleviating concerns that credit unions have over the Financial Services Authority's regulations.

**(AQO 1600/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** On 1 February 2012 I wrote to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury to reiterate my concerns regarding the investment potential of Northern Ireland Credit Unions under Financial Services Authority regulation. As a result the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has offered to facilitate a meeting between Northern Ireland MPs and the Financial Services Authority in order that concerns can be raised with the Regulator directly.

Additionally, the Financial Services Authority have agreed to host a series of 'information surgeries' in Belfast between 21-23 May 2012. All Northern Ireland credit unions have been invited to attend and will be afforded the opportunity to raise queries and discuss concerns they may have about Financial Services Authority regulation.

### **Invest NI: North Belfast**

**Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance InvestNI has given to small and medium sized enterprises in North Belfast in the last year.

**(AQO 1601/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The SME sector is the lifeblood of our local economy and helping our SMEs to develop and expand into new markets is one of Invest NI's key objectives. Invest NI therefore offers a wide range of financial assistance to SMEs which are at the growth stage and which can demonstrate that their plans will contribute to increasing Northern Ireland's productivity.

Between 1st March 2011 and 29th February 2012, Invest NI approved offers worth almost £950,000 to SMEs in North Belfast.

You may also be aware that in November 2011, I launched the Jobs Fund with the specific aim of boosting job creation. The Jobs Fund includes a measure aimed at young people aged 16-24 not in employment, education or training which offers a business start grant of £1,500 upon business start up. I am pleased to say that there has been a very positive uptake of this strand of the Jobs Fund in North Belfast with 11 offers having already been issued to young people in the constituency. The Jobs Fund also includes a business start grant of £1,000 for people living in a Neighbourhood Renewal Area and 45 offers have been issued in the last year to people living in North Belfast, creating 15 new jobs to date.

There are also several more projects at varying stages of negotiation and I can assure you that we are committed to helping our North Belfast-based SMEs grow and develop in the months and years ahead.

### **Business: Energy Costs**

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures she can take in conjunction with her Executive colleagues to reduce costs for large energy consumers in the business community.

**(AQO 1602/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** I appreciate the concerns of consumers regarding energy prices, however my Department does not set electricity and gas tariffs. Rather, it works with the Utility Regulator to develop market conditions to put downward pressure on prices.

I have been examining the feasibility of Invest NI providing financial assistance to a limited number of Large Energy Users who could show that by making a significant capital investment, they could reduce their energy costs. As I advised the Assembly

on 13 March 2012, Invest NI is willing to consider providing financial assistance on a pilot basis, under its normal Selective Financial Assistance schemes, to Large Energy Users who have proposals for capital expenditure which will make a significant impact on energy efficiency and therefore reduce their costs and improve competitiveness.

### **Invest NI: SMEs**

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department is encouraging InvestNI to play a greater role in providing support to local small and medium sized enterprises.

**(AQO 1603/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** My Department has taken the lead in working with the Executive Sub-group on the Economy and Invest NI to develop a coherent Economic Strategy whose ultimate aim is to improve the economic competitiveness of the Northern Ireland economy.

The Northern Ireland Economic Strategy aims to develop an economy based on innovative firms competing in export markets.

As part of the Economic Strategy my Department is currently developing an Enterprise Strategy which will set out what we are doing to improve the local business environment for all companies in all sectors, not just those who are exporting. There will be a focus on promoting enterprise, entrepreneurship, creating the necessary conditions and providing access to finance to enable businesses across all sectors of the economy, including SMEs, to grow.

The Executive's Economic priority is to improve economic competitiveness in order to increase employment and prosperity. The Northern Ireland Economic Strategy aims to develop an economy based on innovative firms competing in export markets. The Strategy contains a number of measures which aim to grow indigenous SMEs.

### **Business Start-ups: South Antrim**

**Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to encourage more investment in business start-ups in the South Antrim constituency.

**(AQO 1604/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI works directly, and with partner organisations in the South Antrim area, to promote investment in business start ups and provides a range of support, both financial and advisory.

While Invest NI is not currently delivering a Business Start Programme, it has put in place appropriate arrangements to respond to business start enquiries to ensure potential entrepreneurs can access the relevant advice and support that they need. This activity is supporting the needs of potential entrepreneurs as they move into self employment.

In addition, Invest NI's Boosting Business initiative, encompassing support under five themes: Jobs, R & D, Exports, Technology and Skills, is available to new start businesses. Its Jobs Fund which provides rapid support for employment creation, would be particularly relevant to export focused new start entrepreneurs, at a time when cashflow is often strained.

Invest NI's North Eastern Regional Office is also working closely with Councils in the South Antrim area to develop a range of new programmes, supported by the Local Economic Development Measure of the Sustainable Competitiveness Programme, targeted at small businesses that have not traditionally been able to avail of Invest NI support. Start up businesses would be eligible to participate.

## **Department of the Environment**

### **Tree Protection Orders**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment how many trees, which were under Tree Protection Orders, were felled or destroyed in each of the last five years, broken down by council area; and how many prosecutions resulted from the destruction of these trees.

**(AQW 7438/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):** The Department will investigate all alleged breaches of planning control. However, when determining what (if any) action is to be taken, the Department has a general discretion on whether to take enforcement action against a breach of planning control. It does so when it considers it expedient, having regard to the provisions of the development plan and any other material consideration. Priority will be given to those breaches where, in the Department's opinion, the greatest harm is being caused. Where the extent of the breach is considered by the Department to be minor in nature and the impact on the environment minimal, the Department may consider that it is not expedient to take formal enforcement action. This consideration must be made on a case by case basis.

The Department's IT system was upgraded in March 2009 and only live case information as of 1 April 2009 was backdated into the upgraded system; hence information is only available from that date. Furthermore, information is not captured within the Department's IT system in such a way as to enable the Department to identify how many trees, protected by Tree Protection Orders were felled or destroyed in each of the last five years broken down by council area.

However, during the last three business years, the number of enforcement cases investigated relating to the alleged cutting down, uprooting or wilfully destroying a tree, or wilfully damaging, topping or lopping a tree protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) are set out in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Number of Enforcement Cases relating to Tree Protection Orders or Trees in Conservation Area (Prosecution)**

| <b>Business Year/District</b> | <b>2009/10</b> | <b>2010/11</b> | <b>2011/2012<br/>(Dec 2011)</b> |
|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| Antrim                        | 1              | 0              | 1                               |
| Ards                          | 2              | 1              | 2                               |
| Armagh                        | 0              | 1              | 1                               |
| Ballymena                     | 2              | 0              | 0                               |
| Ballymoney                    | 1              | 1              | 2                               |
| Banbridge                     | 1              | 1              | 1                               |
| Belfast                       | 7              | 10             | 8                               |
| Carrickfergus                 | 1              | 0              | 0                               |
| Castlereagh                   | 0              | 0              | 0                               |
| Coleraine                     | 2              | 3              | 0                               |
| Cookstown                     | 0              | 0              | 0                               |
| Craigavon                     | 0              | 1              | 0                               |
| Derry                         | 4              | 2              | 4                               |
| Down                          | 0              | 3              | 4                               |
| Dungannon                     | 0              | 0              | 0                               |
| Fermanagh                     | 2              | 0              | 0                               |
| Larne                         | 0              | 1              | 0                               |
| Limavady                      | 1              | 0              | 1                               |
| Lisburn                       | 4              | 3              | 1                               |
| Magherafelt                   | 2              | 1              | 2                               |
| Moyle                         | 1              | 0              | 0                               |
| Newry and Mourne              | 2              | 3              | 0                               |
| Newtownabbey                  | 3              | 3              | 5                               |
| North Down                    | 7              | 4              | 5                               |
| Omagh                         | 1              | 2              | 0                               |
| Strabane                      | 0              | 0              | 0                               |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>44</b>      | <b>40</b>      | <b>37</b>                       |

It is important to note that the vast majority of breaches of planning control are resolved informally through negotiation with the owner/occupier or through the submission and consideration of a retrospective planning application.

Of these 121 cases, one prosecution resulted from the destruction of trees protected by a TPO. In November 2011, a Co Tyrone man was fined £5,000 with court costs of £85 at Omagh Magistrates' Court for a breach of a DOE Planning Tree Preservation Order.

Whilst only one prosecution has resulted from the above investigations on cases opened in the last three business years, 43% of the 121 cases when investigated did not breach planning control; and, 14% were remedied/received planning permission. A summary of closure reasons are set out in the Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Reason for Closure**

|                                | <b>Cases closed</b> |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| No Breach                      | 52                  |
| Not Expedient                  | 19                  |
| Planning Permission Granted    | 3                   |
| Remedied Resolved              | 14                  |
| Immune from Enforcement Action | 1                   |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>89</b>           |

As of the 28 February, 32 of the 121 cases relating to the alleged cutting down, uprooting or wilfully destroying a tree, or wilfully damaging, topping or lopping a tree protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) remain 'live'.

### Listed Buildings: Breakdown by Grade

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of listed buildings, broken down by grade; and (ii) whether the buildings are (a) private homes; (b) commercial premises; or (c) public buildings.

**(AQW 7514/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The last published figures (31 March 2011) in relation to listed buildings indicates a total of 8472 listed buildings. The breakdown by grade is as follows;

| Grade      | A   | B+  | B1   | B2   | B    |
|------------|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| Total 8472 | 204 | 556 | 3512 | 2515 | 1685 |

The recently published Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report published by the department also contains statistics on the number of listed buildings. This information is available online at

<http://www.doeni.gov.uk/statistics>.

It should be noted that in some cases a record can cover more than one building, such as terraces or estates, so it not possible to state exactly how many separate buildings may be listed; but I understand that the figure would be in the region of 8500.

If a property has been through the Second Survey process, then information is available on the previous and current use of the building. However, this is recorded as the particular building type, and does not detail commercial, public or privately owned property. Only limited information is available for buildings which have not been second surveyed.

I have asked officials to consider how statistical information on such buildings can be increased.

### AQW 5351/11-15

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of the Environment why the answer to AQW 5351/11-15 was provided to the press before it was provided to the MLA who tabled the question.

**(AQW 7721/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** When the press query was received, my Press Office sought out the draft reply to your AQW (AQW5351/11-15) to use as the source for the Department's answer to the media query. It was then discovered that due to an oversight the AQW had not been answered. A reply was immediately drafted, which I then approved.

The reply was sent to the Business Office and delivered to your pigeon hole in Parliament Buildings. As the media query had to be answered the Press Office provided a reply. The reply may not have reached your pigeon hole prior to it being released to the media. I trust this explains the situation.

### Council Staff: Redundancy or Retirement Packages

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 5798/11-15, to detail (i) the former pay scale of each of the local council staff when they retired or took a redundancy package, and whether they were employed on a (a) full-time; or (b) part-time basis; and; (ii) the current pay scale of each person who returned to work, and whether they are employed on a (a) full-time; or (b) part-time basis.

**(AQW 8062/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** In AQW 5798/11-15 it was recorded that three council employees who took retirement packages were subsequently re-employed. The details of these are as follows:

Person A was originally employed on a scale £54,540 to £60,576 on a full time basis. The officer returned on the same scale, but was employed on a part time pro rata basis.

Person B was originally employed on a scale £24,402 to £30,356 on a full time basis. On their initial return to the council, the employee worked on a casual part time basis, but was then subsequently employed on a full time basis for four months to cover maternity leave before returning to part time. The rate of pay for the part time post was pro rata £19,621 to £23,708 and for full time post was £23,708 per annum.

Person C was originally employed on a scale £38,961 to £41,616 on a full time basis. The person has since been re-employed on a casual ad hoc basis at a rate of £8.3211 per hour.

AQW 5798/11-15 had also referred to one employee who took a redundancy package and was re-employed at a later stage. Further investigation indicated that this person had not been re-employed. The response to AQW 5798/11-15 is, therefore, being corrected.

### Questions for Written Answer: Failure to Meet Time Limits

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of the Environment why he consistently fails to comply with the requirements of Standing Order 20B(4) in relation to the time limits for answering written Assembly Questions.

**(AQO 1427/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I fully appreciate the requirement to answer all written assembly questions within the time limits as set out in Standing Order 20B (4), and I acknowledge some delays on occasions. I believe this situation has all been rectified.

My main aim is to ensure that members' questions are fully considered and addressed and that all relevant issues are integrated into any reply. Standing Order 19(5) addresses the content of Ministerial replies where "A question must be answered as clearly and as fully as possible". I consider that my reply to AQ's fulfil this standard, as I try to include and disclose as much information as possible. This may mean that deadlines suffer.

I am committed to ensuring that any issues raised by members are dealt with fully in line with the requirements of Standing Orders. I will also continue to work with officials to ensure that processes and procedures for dealing with Assembly Questions are as effective and efficient as possible.

### Cycling By-laws: North Down

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the process to amend the No-Cycling By-Laws in the North Down Borough Council area.

**(AQW 9153/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The bye-laws that currently regulate cycling in the district of North Down are the Pleasure Ground Bye-laws, which were confirmed jointly by this Department and the Department of Education in 1995. The 1995 bye-laws regulate cycling only in relation to pleasure grounds designated by the Council and listed in the Schedule to those bye-laws.

North Down Borough Council has indicated its intention to replace the 1995 bye-laws with a new set of Bye-laws for Pleasure Grounds, Public Walks and Open Spaces. The proposed bye-laws will include provision to regulate cycling in designated areas, as well as other matters such as horses and animals, field sports and games, camping, trading, and the use of metal detectors. The bye-laws will need confirmation by this Department and the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure, which has lead responsibility for one of the enabling powers under which the bye-laws are to be made.

Following advice from the Department, the Council submitted a re-drafted set of bye-laws, together with supporting information, on 27 October 2011.

Officials have scrutinised this draft and are currently awaiting further comment from Departmental Solicitor's Office, which is expected shortly. This will be conveyed to the Council at the earliest opportunity.

When the bye-laws have been agreed by all parties involved, the Council will be required, by section 91 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, to advertise the bye-laws in two newspapers circulating in the locality, and to make copies available for public inspection, in its offices, at least one month before submitting them for confirmation.

### Listed Building: 1 Stewart's Place, Holywood

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of the Environment how much funding was allocated for the repairs to the listed building at 1 Stewart's Place, Holywood, and whether this funding has been accepted and spent.

**(AQW 9155/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The NIEA Historic Buildings Unit (HBU) has been in contact with the owners of 1 Stewarts Place (Wilson Group) since 13 Oct 2008, when a site meeting was held to agree the scope of urgent remedial works.

Subsequent to that meeting, and after the issue of a dangerous structure notice from building control - as well as a warning letter from HBU - some urgent repair works were carried out. Following this first intervention, an application for NIEA listed building grant-aid was made to carry out further urgent repairs, along with some less urgent works, to address repairs to the building.

After prolonged negotiations with the Wilson group - as to the extent of the works - a letter of offer was made on 3 October 2011, for the sum of £2,010. This offer of grant-aid has been declined, and the owners have stated that - due to the difficult economic environment - they do not intend to proceed with the works agreed in the grant-aid application.



On the 5 February, the Wilson Group indicated, in a telephone conversation with the NIEA Area Architect, that they would be willing to carry out the minimum works necessary to fulfil their statutory obligations, to secure the fabric of the building. An 'Urgent Works' warning letter will be issued to the owners by the NIEA Conservation Architect on 12 March, confirming the works which must be undertaken to safeguard this building.

### Listed Building: 131 Hillsborough Road, Dromore

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of the Environment what action has been taken to safeguard and restore Turnpike Cottage (Toll House), a listed building at 131, Hillsborough Road, Dromore, HB Ref No: HB19/05/124.

**(AQW 9156/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Planning Policy Statement 6 states '...while there is not a specific duty on owners to keep their buildings in a good state of repair it will normally be in their best interests to do so'. The Department has statutory powers to take action where a historic building has deteriorated, to the extent that its preservation may be at risk. In practice the department will normally try to enter into dialogue with the listed building owner, in an attempt to find a way to rectify the situation before resorting to legal action.

This building is graded B1 and is on the Built Heritage at Risk Northern Ireland (BHARNI) Register. It was sold to the present owner in 2007. Officials in NIEA have been engaging with the owner's representatives since then, to seek action to secure this important listed building, and with a local Building Preservation Trust, to try to find a solution to arrest its deterioration.

My officials have advised that the owner has not demonstrated an intention to carry out works to secure this building, despite repeated efforts by the NIEA: Historic Buildings Unit to encourage him to do so.

NIEA is in the process of serving an Urgent Works Notice on this property.

### Allotments

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment how much land each council currently makes available for public allotments.

**(AQW 9160/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Following AQO 1420, a paper documenting the number of allotments provided by councils was placed in the Assembly Library. That paper advised that there were 602 allotments provided by 11 councils. The following table identifies the amount of land currently provided by councils in relation to those allotments.

| District Council           | Area of Allotments in Square Metres |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Belfast                    | 44,109                              |
| Carrickfergus              | 47,395                              |
| Castlereagh                | 885                                 |
| Derry                      | 8,400                               |
| Larne                      | 900                                 |
| Lisburn                    | 21,400                              |
| Newtownabbey               | 4,006                               |
| North Down                 | 4,135                               |
| Strabane                   | 6,994                               |
| Dungannon and South Tyrone | 1,296                               |
| Magherafelt                | 840                                 |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>140,360</b>                      |

### Listed Buildings: North Down

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the listed buildings in the North Down constituency.

**(AQW 9161/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Based upon the 1974 ward boundaries, which is how the department holds such records, the total number of listed buildings in the North Down Borough Council Area is 255. The North Down constituency also includes two electoral wards of Ards Borough Council in Donaghadee, which contain a further 58 listed buildings (highlighted in bold). This gives a total of 313 listed buildings in your constituency.

It should be noted that North Down is currently being reviewed 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](http://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 therefore the figures should not be taken as definitive in relation to the current boundaries. For that reason I have appended, for your information, a table which shows the number of the listed buildings within each ward of the North Down and Ards Borough Council Areas.

You may also wish to note that NDBC – which is a statutory consultee in the listing process - has been provided with a copy of each listing in its area, as the listing process has proceeded over the years since the introduction of the legislation in the early 1970's.

#### Number of Listed buildings in the North Down and Ards District Council Areas

| HB23 - North Down |                   |            | HB24 - Ards |                  |            |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------|------------------|------------|
| 1                 | Groomspoint       | 13         | 1           | Portaferry       | 73         |
| 2                 | Churchill         | 1          | 2           | Kircubbin        | 22         |
| 3                 | Ballyholme        | 1          | 3           | Ballyhalbert     | 5          |
| 4                 | Ballymagee        | 1          | 4           | Grey Abbey       | 62         |
| 5                 | Bangor Harbour    | 24         | 5           | Carrowdore       | 6          |
| 6                 | Conlig            | 4          | 6           | Donaghadee North | 26         |
| 7                 | Bangor Castle     | 24         | 7           | Donaghadee South | 32         |
| 8                 | Whitehill         | 0          | 8           | Loughries        | 10         |
| 9                 | Rathgael          | 0          | 9           | Movilla          | 5          |
| 10                | Clandeboyne       | 18         | 10          | Glen             | 3          |
| 11                | Silverstream      | 0          | 11          | Scrabo           | 16         |
| 12                | Spring Hill       | 0          | 12          | Ulsterville      | 0          |
| 13                | Bryansburn        | 1          | 13          | Central          | 43         |
| 14                | Princetown        | 12         | 14          | Comber North     | 0          |
| 15                | Crawfordsburn     | 23         | 15          | Comber South     | 32         |
| 16                | Craigavad         | 20         | 16          | Ballygowan       | 13         |
| 17                | Loughview         | 6          | 17          | Killinchy        | 31         |
| 18                | Cultra            | 29         |             |                  |            |
| 19                | Hollywood Demesne | 11         |             |                  |            |
| 20                | Hollywood Priory  | 67         |             |                  |            |
|                   | <b>Total</b>      | <b>255</b> |             | <b>Total</b>     | <b>379</b> |

#### Areas of Special Scientific Interest: Prosecutions

**Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of the Environment whether there is automatic prosecution of parties that are found to have destroyed an Area of Special Scientific Interest.

**(AQW 9206/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The decision as to whether to prosecute parties suspected of having destroyed an Area of Special Scientific Interest ultimately rests with Public Prosecution Service.

Article 46 of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (as amended) defines the offences in relation to Areas of Special Scientific Interest, which include carrying out or permitting to be carried out an operation requiring the written consent as defined in the declaration documents, and the damage or destruction of the special features of the ASSI, without reasonable excuse.

Following criminal investigations if there is found to be significant, non-rectifiable environmental damage or destruction to the special site selection features, where there is evidence of an offence under the Environment Order and a suspect or suspects

can be identified, the Department will refer the case to Public Prosecution Service (PPS) for their consideration for prosecution through the courts.

### **MOT Test Centres: CCTV**

**Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of the Environment whether any MOT centres have CCTV installed.  
(AQW 9208/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** CCTV cameras have been installed in the reception areas at two Driver & Vehicle Agency test centres: Balmoral Road, Belfast, and Jubilee Road, Newtownards.

### **Hospitality: Arm's-length Bodies**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 6360/11-15, whether the figures provided include the Department's arm's-length bodies; and if not, to provide this information for each of the last five years.  
(AQW 9218/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** The response to AQW 6360/11-15 included hospitality expenditure in relation to meetings held by the Department's three Statutory Advisory Councils (the Historic Monuments Council, Historic Buildings Council and the Council for Nature Conservation and Countryside).

The figures, however, did not cover the Department's two Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB's), the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) and the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC). Hospitality is not provided to guests who attend NILGOSC functions. LGSC hospitality expenditure is detailed in the table below.

|                                   | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| NDPB                              | £       | £       | £       | £       | £       |
| Local Government Staff Commission | 1,427   | 1,508   | 1,226   | 778     | 1,103   |

### **Buses: Consumption of Alcohol**

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) whether he is aware of bus operators continuing to allow young passengers, often below the legal drinking age, to consume alcohol in their vehicles; (ii) how many times, in each of the last two years, enforcement officers have spoken to bus operators about the consumption of alcohol in their vehicles; and (iii) the circumstances, including all allegations, investigations and any subsequent penalties imposed on each bus operator.  
(AQW 9267/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** As Minister responsible for road safety, the problem of alcohol on buses and coaches is of great concern to me, and I intend to take whatever action is necessary to deal with it.

I met with representatives of the nightclub industry on 7 March 2012 to discuss ways in which the owners of pubs and clubs could improve the management of their activities in order to address my concerns about the related issues of health, safety and public order, particularly in relation to young people. This was a frank meeting and the key issues were raised.

I am also meeting with a number of licensed bus operators on 14 March 2012 to highlight my concerns to them and to identify what further action might be taken to address the problem. Again, this was a straight talking meeting. During both meetings, I stated that the public, political and media spotlight was on them and that the irresponsible proprietors needed to get their house in order.

I have also instructed my officials to identify and explore any options that may be available, including any changes to the relevant legislation or to the regulatory regime, in consultation as necessary with partner organisations such as the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department for Regional Development and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, as well as with the industry itself.

Responsibility for enforcement in this area lies primarily with the PSNI, and for that reason the Department does not hold any statistical information in relation to advice given or action taken on operators regarding the consumption of alcohol on their vehicles.

I shall update the Committee of the short term and longer term interventions I propose.

### **Buses: Access NI Disclosures**

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) how his Department ensures that all bus operators request an Access NI enhanced disclosure on bus drivers, who are responsible for transporting children to and from school before they are hired; and (ii) whether he is aware that bus drivers do not have to be registered with the Independent Safeguard Authority; and for his assessment of this situation.  
(AQW 9268/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** A person who applies to the Department of the Environment for a driving licence to drive a passenger-carrying vehicle (PCV) must provide a recent basic disclosure certificate issued by AccessNI. This certificate will show any unspent

convictions, and may therefore indicate that the applicant is not a fit person to hold such a licence. The Department has a statutory duty, under Article 71 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, to carry out such conduct checks before issuing PCV drivers' licences.

The driving of buses which carry children to and from school is a regulated activity for the purposes of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007. It is the responsibility of the employer of anyone who will be carrying out a regulated activity to ensure that a higher level of conduct check is undertaken. In general, the employer must be registered with AccessNI as a Registered Body.

In its capacity as the driver licensing authority, the Department of the Environment is not a registered body under the Order, and cannot therefore access the information which would be disclosed under AccessNI's Standard or Enhanced Disclosure schemes.

The Independent Safeguarding Authority maintains records of those who are barred from working with children and vulnerable adults. However, the Department, as it is not a registered employer, does not have access to that information.

Policy on protecting children and vulnerable adults in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Department for Justice, the Department for Education and the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

I have met with officials recently on this general issue and am looking at what more needs to be done to build public confidence.

### **Newry River: Bridge Project**

**Ms Ruane** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for an update on his Department's role in the Narrow Water Bridge Project; (ii) what discussions have taken place within his Department, or with its arm's-length bodies, in relation to the project; and (iii) whether his Department intends to support the planning applications for the project.

**(AQW 9273/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:**

- (i) An application for the erection of a new single carriageway bridge across Newry River was received by DOE Planning on 09 February 2012 and is being processed by the Southern Area Planning Office. The application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement and is at the initial stages of consideration. Consultations have been issued to the relevant bodies and following receipt of their comments an opinion will be formed on the proposal at the earliest opportunity.
- (ii) The project has been the subject of considerable pre-application discussion between Planning, the applicant and agents and interested consultees including NIEA, Roads Service etc. Senior Planning Officials have also met with Officials from Louth County Council and Newry and Mourne Council, to discuss the project.
- (iii) In reaching an opinion, Planning are fully aware of the social and economic benefits that would follow from the development of the bridge and these will be taken into consideration in the decision making process, along with the other normal planning and environmental criteria. I recognise that the Mournes and wider area is a wonderful natural asset which should be protected and positively developed. The Bridge Project is an important application and Planning will very carefully consider the proposal.

### **Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Adoption Timescale**

**Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of the Environment whether the new Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan will be adopted before the end of 2012, given that the development plan process began in 1999; and to outline the reasons for his position on this issue.

**(AQW 9276/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** All outstanding information regarding the BMAP Public Inquiry has now been received by my Department. The PAC has reported on the considerable number of objections and highlights the complexity of the strategic issues.

The Department has a small dedicated team considering all the information presented and working towards adoption of the Plan. Consideration of the strategic issues is on-going and much of the work on the individual Districts is well progressed.

I am considering if it is legally feasible and operationally appropriate to see the rollout of the plan in an earlier timescale.

### **Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Adoption Timescale**

**Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of the Environment to provide a timescale for the final preparation and adoption of the new Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan; and if he can offer an assurance that there will be no further delays.

**(AQW 9277/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) has now delivered all outstanding information to my Department relating to the BMAP public inquiry that finished in May 2008.

A dedicated team is currently working through the extensive PAC recommendations in order to prepare the Plan for adoption. Significant work in relation to individual Districts has already been progressed. At present it is anticipated that adoption will take place early in 2013.

I am considering if it is legally feasible and operationally appropriate to see the rollout of the plan in an earlier timescale.

## Snares: Regulations

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to introduce regulations to control the use of snares.  
(AQW 9283/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** The Department aims to begin a consultation process on proposed regulations to control the use of snares by the summer of 2012.

## Metal Theft

**Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to (i) combat the escalation in metal theft; and (ii) reduce the opportunities to sell stolen metal.  
(AQW 9310/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** The primary responsibility for combating theft (including of metal) lies with the PSNI and the Department of Justice. However, DOE recognises the benefit of using the environmental legislation that it is charged with enforcing to assist in tackling the problem using a multi-agency approach.

Through a strategic partnership, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency is working with the PSNI on all environmental crime and the harm it does to communities. The issue of metal theft has been identified as one where the environmental legislation implemented by DOE has a role to play in tackling the issue of metal theft. As a result of the Department's officers sharing knowledge on DOE's waste enforcement powers and working with PSNI colleagues, a number of cases involving suspected metal theft are currently being progressed through the Courts where defendants have breached environmental legislation as part of their activities.

The Department has a robust monitoring system for licensed waste management facilities including those that can accept scrap metal, and will also be participating in an inter-agency group, to be led by the Department of Justice, examining possible responses to tackling the issue of metal theft in Northern Ireland.

## Away-days and Team-building Exercises: Cost-effectiveness

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department assesses the cost-effectiveness of awaydays and team-building exercises.  
(AQW 9336/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** Occasionally, officials in my Department may organise time away from the office, but for business reasons only. For example, as part of the business planning cycle, senior officials including the Permanent Secretary have set aside time away from DOE HQ to consider the Department's contribution to the 2011-2015 Programme for Government and to identify other key priorities for the 4 year period covered by PfG. Existing DOE premises were used for this purpose, as is currently the case in most instances away from the office. I am advised by officials that this Department has not engaged in away days for team building purposes for some years.

I am satisfied with the cost effectiveness of away days where they are restricted to business related activities and where unnecessary expense is not incurred in the form of rental of private premises. I have instructed officials to remind staff that these criteria must be adhered to.

## Council Elections: Female Candidates

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment what percentage he intends to set for the proposed quota of female candidates for the council elections.  
(AQW 9372/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** I believe in quotas for female candidates and I am pleased that there has been considerable support for the proposal.

As I have said previously, I am awaiting legal advice on where the legislative competency for the introduction of a quota resides, before considering this matter further.

## Cycling Proficiency Courses

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of the Environment how many cycling proficiency courses were held at schools in (i) the 2010/11 academic year; and (ii) this academic year to date.  
(AQW 9390/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** In the 2010 – 2011 academic year 575 schools participated in the Cycling Proficiency Scheme (CPS) and 8,760 were trained. In the current academic year to date, 12 schools have already participated in the scheme, compared to 14 in the previous academic year. This is not unusual as most schools choose to deliver CPS training during the final academic term of each year.

In recent years the number of schools participating in CPS has remained steady at approximately 580, with an average of 8,880 – 9,000 children trained each year. The current indications are that numbers will be similar this year.

### Road Safety Education Officers

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of the Environment how many Road Safety Education Officers are employed by his Department. (AQW 9391/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** There are currently ten Road Safety Education Officers and three Senior Road Safety Officers employed in the Department.

### Driving Licences

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of the Environment how many people currently hold a driving licence. (AQW 9672/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** On 15th March 2012, a total of 1,151,487 people held valid Northern Ireland driving licences, 110,618 of which are provisional driving licences with no full entitlement to drive cars or motorcycles.

## Department of Finance and Personnel

### Special Adviser: Pay Band

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) where and when the proposal to increase the upper limit of the Band B salary scale for Special Advisers to £90,000 originated; (ii) whether the First Minister and deputy First Minister were consulted about the decision taken by his Department on 18 July 2011 in relation to the increase; (iii) what input the First Minister and deputy First Minister had to the decision; and (iv) whether other Ministers were consulted. (AQW 1711/11-15)

**Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):** I took the decision in my role as Minister with responsibility for civil service pay to set the upper limit of the pay band B for Special Advisers at £90,000.

### Special Adviser: Specialism

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to outline the specialism which his Special Adviser brings to his office and (ii) whether his Special Adviser holds any role or post outside of his office for which he is remunerated. (AQW 1805/11-15)

**Mr Wilson:** The Special Adviser provides a significant level of policy and political advice and undertakes strategic policy and political analysis. He is a Councillor in Lisburn City Council and a member of Libraries NI.

### Special Adviser: Pay Band

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Special Adviser is paid within Band A or Band B of the his Department's salary scale; and, if it is within Band B whether, in light of the decision to increase the upper limit of the Band B scale to £90,000, there has been an increase in salary or an increase is planned. (AQW 2038/11-15)

**Mr Wilson:** Information on the remuneration of the Special Adviser is published in the Note on Staff Numbers and Related Costs in the Department's Annual Resource Accounts.

### Special Adviser: Ministerial Meetings

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, since the appointment of his current Special Adviser to date, how many meetings (i) he has had with his Special Adviser; (ii) his Special Adviser has had with departmental officials; and (iii) he has attended, accompanied by his Special Adviser. (AQW 2596/11-15)

**Mr Wilson:** The information requested is not readily available and can only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

### Civil Servants

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of civil servants, broken down by (i) grade; and (ii) council area. (AQW 7012/11-15)

**Mr Wilson:** The numbers of civil servants, broken down by (i) grade; and (ii) council area are set out in the attached tables. In view of the large number of grades within the Northern Ireland Civil Service the tables of permanent staff show general service and analogous grades.

**Staff (Headcount) by Grade at 1 April 2011**

| <b>Analogous Grade Level</b>             | <b>Staff Headcount</b> |
|--|------------------------|
| Grade 5+                                 | 241                    |
| Senior Principal/Principal               | 1413                   |
| Deputy Principal                         | 2337                   |
| Staff Officer                            | 3376                   |
| Executive Officer I/Executive Officer II | 7923                   |
| Administrative Officer                   | 8009                   |
| Administrative Assistant                 | 1967                   |
| Industrial Staff                         | 1093                   |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>26359</b>           |

**Staff by Council Area at 1 April 2011**

| <b>Council Area</b> | <b>Total Number Of Nics Staff By Work Location</b> |
|---------------------|--|
| Antrim              | 372  |
| Ards                | 224  |
| Armagh              | 329  |
| Ballymena           | 642  |
| Ballymoney          | 95   |
| Banbridge           | 116  |
| Belfast             | 14980  |
| Carrickfergus       | 281  |
| Castlereagh         | 410  |
| Coleraine           | 927  |
| Cookstown           | 135  |
| Craigavon           | 675  |
| Derry               | 1606   |
| Down                | 474  |
| Dungannon           | 275  |
| Fermanagh           | 516  |
| Larne               | 133  |
| Limavady            | 92   |
| Lisburn             | 687  |
| Magherafelt         | 250  |
| Moyle               | 11   |
| Newry & Mourne      | 407  |
| Newtownabbey        | 198  |
| North Down          | 998  |
| Omagh               | 809  |

| <b>Council Area</b> | <b>Total Number Of Nics Staff By Work Location</b> |
|---------------------|--|
| Strabane            | 112  |
| Unknown*            | 605  |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>26359</b>                                       |

**Notes:**

Data sourced from HR Connect & Additional DOJ databases 1st Apr 2011.

Figures are Staff Headcount.

Figures comprise Staff Headcount for staff working in the 13 Northern Ireland Departments and in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, and staff of The Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland/The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints

Includes all Permanent NICS staff for whom Work Location information is available with the exception of uniformed Prison Service staff.

Staff on career break are excluded.

\*Unknown are staff whose work location was not recorded at the time the information was extracted by the NI Statistics and Research Agency.

**Departments: Pooling Budgets**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department is aware of any instances of Departments, or their agencies, pooling budgets to commission or deliver services in the previous budgetary period; and (ii) whether his Department is aware of any Departments wish to pool budgets to commission or deliver services at any time in the 2011-15 budget period.

**(AQW 8992/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** I am aware of a number of areas involving Departments routinely pooling resources across a range of areas in both the previous and the current budget period. Front line service delivery examples include DHSSPS and DE pooling budgets to provide Children's Services; and another example led by DE, but also involving DSD, DHSSPS, OFMDFM and DCAL is the North Belfast City Learning Centre, which provides community and youth facilities at the Girls and Boys' Model Schools.

In terms of back office functions my Department provides shared services to all NICS Departments and Agencies for the functions of finance, personnel and ICT.

I am sure there is scope to do more in specific service areas and I would always encourage a collective approach, however, you would need to ask the respective Ministers for that level of detail.

**Special EU Programmes Body: External Consultant Spend**

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) how much the Special European Union Programmes Body has spent on external consultants in total and as a percentage of its budget; and (ii) how this compares with his Department's spending on consultants.

**(AQW 9030/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Consultancy Spend (£'000)</b> | <b>% of consultancy spend against annual budget</b> |
|-------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 2007        | 726                              | 1.07%   |
| 2008        | 824                              | 1.77%   |
| 2009        | 886                              | 1.79%   |
| 2010        | 485                              | 0.7%  |
| 2011        | 125                              | 0.2%  |

SEUPB expenditure on consultancy for each of the years 2007-2011 is set out in the table below.

The costs shown are based on contracts awarded within the relevant calendar year. More than half of the costs incurred in any year relate to the engagement of consultants to carry out economic appraisals on allocations to projects seeking PEACE III or INTERREG IVA funding.

All consultancy costs associated with the Programmes are co-funded between the European Regional Development fund (ERDF), Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The Northern Ireland contribution is 16-20% of the overall costs.



My Departments expenditure on consultancy for each of the years 2006-07 to 2010-11 is set out in the table below.

| Year    | Consultancy Spend (£m) | % of consultancy spend against annual expenditure |
|---------|------------------------|---|
| 2006-07 | 4.4                    | 1.8%  |
| 2007-08 | 6.3                    | 2.4%  |
| 2008-09 | 4.5                    | 1.5%  |
| 2009-10 | 1.1                    | 0.4%  |
| 2010-11 | 0.1                    | 0.05%   |

### Unemployment: Derry

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people (i) were unemployed last year; and (ii) are currently unemployed, in the Derry area.

**(AQW 9112/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the sub-regional and annualised LFS estimates for 2011 are, as of yet, unavailable.

As an alternative, the table overleaf provides information from the claimant count measure of unemployment. It shows the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits, in the Foyle Parliamentary Constituency Area, for each month of 2011, as well as the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits in February 2012.

**Table - Numbers claiming Job Seeker's Allowance, Foyle PCA**

| Month          | Number |
|----------------|--------|
| January 2011   | 5,266  |
| February 2011  | 5,305  |
| March 2011     | 5,298  |
| April 2011     | 5,211  |
| May 2011       | 5,178  |
| June 2011      | 5,207  |
| July 2011      | 5,501  |
| August 2011    | 5,679  |
| September 2011 | 5,798  |
| October 2011   | 5,816  |
| November 2011  | 5,633  |
| December 2011  | 5,517  |
| February 2012  | 5,769  |

### Unemployment: Northern Ireland

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people (i) were unemployed last year; and (ii) are currently unemployed.

**(AQW 9113/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). The most recent LFS data available, for the period November 2011 – January 2012, estimate that there were 56,000 people, aged 16 and over, unemployed. An annualised 2011 LFS estimate of unemployment is, as of yet, unavailable.

As an alternative, the table overleaf provides information from the claimant count measure of unemployment. It shows the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits for each month of 2011, as well as the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits in February 2012.

**Table - Numbers claiming Job Seeker's Allowance, Northern Ireland**

| Month          | Number of claimants |
|----------------|---------------------|
| January 2011   | 59,689              |
| February 2011  | 60,447              |
| March 2011     | 59,961              |
| April 2011     | 59,162              |
| May 2011       | 58,644              |
| June 2011      | 58,704              |
| July 2011      | 60,635              |
| August 2011    | 61,805              |
| September 2011 | 61,412              |
| October 2011   | 59,973              |
| November 2011  | 59,373              |
| December 2011  | 59,113              |
| February 2012  | 62,778              |

**Disciplinary Action: DFP Staff**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of staff disciplinary actions taken by his Department in each of the last two years, at Staff Officer level and above, including details of the offence and the disciplinary sanctions applied.

**(AQW 9124/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The information requested is detailed below:

**2010**

| No. of staff | Offence             | Sanction               |
|--------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1            | Criminal conviction | Formal written warning |

**2011 - Nil****VAT/PAYE-registered Businesses**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of registered businesses in each constituency.

**(AQW 9166/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The number of VAT and/or PAYE registered businesses, including agriculture, can be obtained from the Interdepartmental Business Register (IDBR). Table 1, overleaf, provides a breakdown of active businesses in Northern Ireland by Parliamentary Constituency at January 2012. Where a business has more than one local unit (site) the location of the business is based on the postcode of the Head Office reporting for all local units within Northern Ireland.

**Table 1: Numbers of VAT and/or PAYE registered businesses in Northern Ireland, by Parliamentary Constituency<sup>1</sup>**

|                          | No. of Businesses |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Belfast East             | 2,330             |
| Belfast North            | 2,185             |
| Belfast South            | 4,465             |
| Belfast West             | 1,430             |
| East Antrim              | 2,360             |
| East Londonderry         | 3,900             |
| Fermanagh & South Tyrone | 6,610             |

|                | <b>No. of Businesses</b> |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| Foyle          | 2,205                    |
| Lagan Valley   | 3,765                    |
| Mid Ulster     | 5,695                    |
| Newry & Armagh | 5,405                    |
| North Antrim   | 4,790                    |
| North Down     | 2,310                    |
| South Antrim   | 3,445                    |
| South Down     | 5,050                    |
| Strangford     | 3,190                    |
| Upper Bann     | 3,535                    |
| West Tyrone    | 5,095                    |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>67,765</b>            |

- 1 In addition, there were 795 businesses active in Northern Ireland at January 2012 for which the reporting Head Office was outside Northern Ireland. Therefore a Parliamentary Constituency for these businesses could not be determined.

### **Renewable Energy: Public Sector Organisations**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps his Department and particularly the Central Procurement Directorate has taken to improve the uptake of renewable energy amongst public sector organisations.

**(AQW 9209/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) in its guidance on Procurement of Construction Works and Services sets a Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) target of 'Excellent' for new build projects and 'Very Good' for refurbishment projects procured by Departments, Agencies and NDPBs.

Where CPD itself acts as the Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) on behalf of public sector clients, construction procurement practitioners are proactive in advising their construction clients on the scope for incorporating energy saving technologies into projects when initial appraisals indicate that this is both economically and technically feasible.

My Department manages the government office estate and is working to improve the energy efficiency of the buildings within that estate and has put in place an Energy Efficiency/Carbon Reduction Plan (EE/CRP) which aims to achieve a 10% reduction in energy use over the period 2011–2014. A number of renewable technologies have also been trialled within the office estate, including installation of solar panels and biomass boilers. The results of these trials will be used to determine the viability of future installations.

### **Civil Servants: Council Areas**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of civil servants based in each council area.

**(AQW 9223/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** I would refer the Member to the reply I provided to Mr Phil Flanagan in AQW 7012/11-15 issued on 20 March 2012.

### **Rates Capital Value Mechanism: Bottom Band**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the potential benefits of introducing a bottom band in the Rates Capital Value mechanism.

**(AQW 9232/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** This particular issue is an interesting one but it is not something I wish to examine in any detail at this time because of the current uncertainty around the impact of welfare reform; particularly on the ability of the Executive and Assembly to maintain levels of means tested rates support. At the moment this matter is being examined by the Executive Sub Committee on Welfare Reform, amongst many other issues. Therefore, I have not made any assessment of the potential benefits of adopting a bottom band for the domestic rates system.

The issue of a minimum payment was something considered in the Executive's 2007 Review of the system. It was not brought forward at that time because it was not even short listed by the Finance and Personnel Committee as worthy of further consideration by the Executive. It may be something worth re-visiting in the medium or longer term.

I enclose as an appendix a copy of the relevant text from the Committee's report in 2007, together with the Department's analysis of the issue at that time.

### Appendix

Extract from:

Finance and Personnel Committee's Report in response to the 2007 Executive Review of the Domestic Rating System (7 November 2007)

(b) Introduction of a Minimum Payment

13. The Committee identified the following views on this option from the Department's report on the consultation and from the evidence provided to the Committee:

| Arguments For   | Arguments Against  |
|---|--|
| Recognises that there is a basic level of local and regional government services that are consumed by households.   | Those below the capital value threshold would experience a slight increase in rates, whilst those above would experience a slight reduction. |
| Would ensure those in lower value properties, who can afford to pay, make an appropriate contribution to the cost of providing those services.  | Disproportionate impact on lower paid.   |
| Those on low incomes would continue to be supported by the housing benefit system and the rate relief scheme introduced in April 2007.  | Could run counter to new TSN policies.   |
| Setting a minimum payment would significantly increase the cost of housing benefit – could be a funding gain for NI from annually managed expenditure (normally needs Treasury approval). | Caps benefit the very wealthy and/or the very poor with those in the middle left to cover shortfall.   |
|   | Would add to the cost of local rate relief scheme.   |
|   | Potential need for new IT systems may delay introduction.  |

14. In addition to the above arguments the Committee noted the advice from the IRRV that there is presently no need to introduce a minimum payment rule. Under the existing system the payment liability is driven by the person's ability to pay as determined by the value of their house, the local rate relief scheme and the housing benefit scheme.
15. In considering this option, the Committee has also taken account of DFP's summary analysis of the associated costs, benefits, and impacts. (see Annex A)
16. Having considered the available evidence, the Committee recommends that a minimum payment/capital value is not introduced as it is not required given the capacity of the present domestic rating system to determine payment liability, taking account of capital value and entitlement to rate relief and housing benefit.

### ANNEX A

#### DFP's Analysis (2007) - Introduction of Minimum Capital Value

##### Background

While the domestic rating system is considered to be purely a property tax, the introduction of a minimum capital value would recognise the fact that there is a minimum limit to the level of local and regional government services that can be consumed by a household. As with the maximum capital value, the minimum capital value would be set in terms of capital values. That is, once the limit is chosen, any property with a capital value below that limit would be rated as if its capital value is at that limit.

##### Options

The options examined were:

- Introduce a minimum capital value at £75,000 (the lowest such council tax bill in 2007/08 is £454. Based on the average rate in Northern Ireland, this would relate to a property with a capital value of approximately £75,000)
- Introduce a minimum capital value at £50,000 (this relates to the lowest council tax band which exists in Wales, uplifted to January 2005 values)
- Introduce a minimum capital value at £62,500.

##### Impact

The following table shows the revenue gain associated with a minimum capital value and the number of properties faced with a higher rate bill as a result:

| Minimum CV | Revenue increase<br>(compared with current system) | No. properties less than Minimum CV |
|------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| £50k       | £6 - £6.5m   | 56,000                              |
| £62.5k     | £13 - £14m   | 125,000                             |
| £75k       | £27 - £28m   | 210,000                             |

## Redundancies

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people in each constituency were made redundant in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 9278/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The table overleaf details the number of confirmed redundancies by parliamentary constituency in each of the last 3 years.

| Parliamentary Constituency | 2009         | 2010         | 2011         |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Belfast East               | 609          | 367          | 163          |
| Belfast North              | 352          | 224          | 97           |
| Belfast South              | 443          | 377          | 318          |
| Belfast West               | 435          | 64           | 218          |
| East Antrim                | 503          | 119          | 76           |
| East Londonderry           | 185          | 74           | 11           |
| Fermanagh & South Tyrone   | 137          | 18           | 59           |
| Foyle                      | 673          | 145          | 180          |
| Lagan Valley               | 147          | 44           | 32           |
| Mid Ulster                 | 194          | 92           | 81           |
| Newry & Armagh             | 130          | 98           | 94           |
| North Antrim               | 109          | 56           | 156          |
| North Down                 | 130          | 103          | 33           |
| South Antrim               | 89           | 83           | 109          |
| South Down                 | 168          | 1            | 55           |
| Strangford                 | 28           | 8            | 37           |
| Upper Bann                 | 207          | 171          | 70           |
| West Tyrone                | 57           | 52           | 15           |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>4,596</b> | <b>2,096</b> | <b>1,804</b> |

## Procurement Process: Costs

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many times, in each of the last five years, the cost of carrying out a procurement exercise for a contract has been greater than the value of the contract.

**(AQW 9333/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The cost of a procurement exercise includes direct costs incurred by the client; the cost of any professional advisers; and the costs to industry in preparing tender submissions. The total cost depends on the procurement route and the number of firms expressing an interest or submitting a tender.

Central Procurement Directorate does not capture these costs in relation to the procurements that it undertakes on behalf of client bodies and therefore it is not possible to provide the information that you seek.

While individual contracts vary in scale, value and complexity, generally speaking the cost of procuring a low value contract will tend to be higher, relative to the contract value, than the cost of procuring a larger contract. In recognition of this, Central

Procurement Directorate has developed guidance on the simplified procurement of contracts under the respective European thresholds for works, services and supplies. I expect this guidance to be published shortly.

### Vacant Non-domestic Properties: North Down

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of vacant non-domestic properties in each ward of the North Down constituency.

**(AQW 9429/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Information on the number of vacant non-domestic properties in each ward of the North Down constituency is not available as data is collated at District Council and Ward level only.

As at 11th March 2012 there were 583 and 446 non-domestic properties recorded as vacant in the Ards and North Down District Council Areas respectively. The tables attached indicate the number of vacant non-domestic properties for each ward area within the two Council areas.

#### Vacant Non-domestic Properties in the Ards Borough Council Area as at 11th March 2012

| Ward                              | Number of Properties |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Ballygowan                        | 14                   |
| Ballyrainey                       | 63                   |
| Ballywalter                       | 17                   |
| Bradshaws Brae                    | 47                   |
| Carrowdore                        | 17                   |
| Central                           | 139                  |
| Comber East                       | 57                   |
| Comber North                      | *                    |
| Comber West                       | 12                   |
| Donaghadee North                  | 39                   |
| Donaghadee South                  | 6                    |
| Glen                              | *                    |
| Gregstown                         | *                    |
| Killinchy                         | 9                    |
| Kircubbin                         | 18                   |
| Lisbane                           | 12                   |
| Loughries                         | 6                    |
| Millisle                          | 34                   |
| Movilla                           | 12                   |
| Portaferry                        | 36                   |
| Portavogie                        | 23                   |
| Scrabo                            | 8                    |
| Whitespots                        | *                    |
| <b>Ards Borough Council Total</b> | <b>583</b>           |

\* 5 properties or less

**Vacant Non-domestic Properties in the North Down Borough Council Area as at 11th March 2012**

| <b>Ward</b>                             | <b>Number of Properties</b> |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Ballyholme                              | *                           |
| Ballymagee                              | *                           |
| Bangor Castle                           | 39                          |
| Bloomfield                              | 28                          |
| Broadway                                | *                           |
| Bryansburn                              | 8                           |
| Clandeboye                              | 14                          |
| Conlig                                  | 79                          |
| Craigavad                               | *                           |
| Crawfordsburn                           | 6                           |
| Cultra                                  | *                           |
| Dufferin                                | *                           |
| Groomsport                              | 19                          |
| Harbour                                 | 116                         |
| Hollywood Demesne                       | 41                          |
| Hollywood Priory                        | 29                          |
| Loughview                               | 7                           |
| Princetown                              | *                           |
| Rathgael                                | 15                          |
| Silverstream                            | 8                           |
| Spring Hill                             | *                           |
| Ward not identifiable                   | *                           |
| <b>North Down Borough Council Total</b> | <b>446</b>                  |

\* 5 properties or less

**Woodland: UK Forestry Standard**

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether all the bodies or organisations within his Department's remit which own woodland are compliant with the UK Forestry Standard, including his Department, any arm's-length body and any organisation to which his Department provides grant aid.

**(AQW 9437/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Stormont Estate is the only managed woodland area for which DFP is directly responsible. The Estate is compliant with the UK Forestry Standard.

None of the Department's arm's-length bodies own woodland.

The Department provides grant aid to the Somme Association who own woodland in France. The Association is not required to comply with the UK Forestry Standard however the woodland is managed in a manner that complies with French forestry legislation.

**Professional Indemnity Insurance: Architects**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why it is necessary for architects and other professionals to carry professional indemnity insurance of £5 million to tender for minor works contracts of up to £0.5 million.

**(AQW 9498/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The setting of the level of Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) cover is a matter for the department procuring the professional services. The decision should be based on an assessment of the risks associated with the particular project. There is no requirement for departments to insist on £5 million cover in all cases. Higher or lower levels of cover may be appropriate, depending on the circumstances. Potential losses by a public body resulting from professional negligence may exceed the consultant's fee or the value of the construction contract, particularly where the project has a low value. CPD is currently finalising a Procurement Guidance Note which will provide advice on the levels of PII cover that should be sought by departments. I expect the guidance to issue shortly.

### **Professional Indemnity Insurance: Republic of Ireland**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the disparity between the practice in the Republic of Ireland, where an architect or other professional has to produce evidence of £1 million professional indemnity cover to tender for a public works contract to a value of £1 million, compared with Northern Ireland where the requirement is £5 million indemnity. **(AQW 9499/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The setting of the level of Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) cover is a matter for the department procuring the professional services. The decision should be based on an assessment of the risks associated with the particular project. There is no requirement for departments to insist on £5 million cover in all cases. Higher or lower levels of cover may be appropriate, depending on the circumstances. Potential losses by a public body resulting from professional negligence may exceed the consultant's fee or the value of the construction contract, particularly where the project has a low value. CPD is currently finalising a Procurement Guidance Note which will provide advice on the levels of PII cover that should be sought by departments, including that for lower value, lower risk projects. I expect this guidance to issue shortly.

### **Professional Indemnity Insurance: Requirements**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will undertake a review of the requirements for professional indemnity insurance cover, given the current cost of such cover, the contradiction between the contract value and the limit of indemnity required for minor works contracts, and the subsequent difficulties imposed on smaller professional firms in tendering for Government contracts. **(AQW 9500/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** I am aware of the potential for disproportionate levels of Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) cover to act as a barrier to small professional practices competing for government contracts. In light of this, a review has already been carried out and Central Procurement Directorate is finalising a Procurement Guidance Note on Liability and Insurance in Government contracts, which will provide advice on the levels of PII cover that should normally be sought by departments. The key principle will be that the cover should be proportionate to the risks associated with the project. I expect the guidance to issue shortly.

### **Royal Ulster Constabulary Athletic Association: Funding**

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what funding his Department provides to the PSNI for the Royal Ulster Constabulary Athletic Association; and whether he intends to withdraw any funding should the Association not change its name. **(AQW 9504/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** My Department does not provide specific funding to individual bodies. Funding is allocated to the Department of Justice and it is for the Minister of Justice to decide how he allocates his budget.

### **Media Communications Protocols**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what media communications protocols exist between his Department and each of its arm's-length bodies; and to publish these protocols. **(AQW 9657/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** No written media communications protocols exist within the Department and its arm's-length bodies.

### **Economy: Joint Ministerial Working Group**

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the second Joint Ministerial Working Group Meeting on Rebalancing the NI Economy held on 7 March 2012. **(AQO 1608/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** We had a constructive discussion at the second meeting of the Joint Ministerial Working Group earlier this month, particularly around the potential costs and practical implications of transferring corporation tax powers. I have always maintained that it is vital that any devolution of these powers is at a fair and reasonable cost to Northern Ireland. Considerable progress has been made on the work programme agreed at the first meeting but there is still work to be done over the coming months. That said, the work programme remains on course and is still anticipated to be completed in time for the Ministerial Working Group to produce a report for a decision in the summer.



## Corporation Tax/Air Passenger Duty

**Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on discussions with Treasury on the transfer of Corporation Tax and Air Passenger Duty powers.

**(AQO 1606/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** We had a constructive discussion at the second meeting of the Joint Ministerial Working Group earlier this month, particularly around the potential costs and practical implications of transferring corporation tax powers. I have always maintained that it is vital that any devolution of these powers is at a fair and reasonable cost to Northern Ireland. Considerable progress has been made on the work programme agreed at the first meeting but there is still work to be done over the coming months. That said, the work programme remains on course and is still anticipated to be completed in time for the Ministerial Working Group to produce a report for a decision in the summer.

Turning to Air Passenger Duty, discussions with the Treasury are ongoing to finalise the precise arrangements for the devolution of these powers, including the associated costs and necessary administrative changes. The necessary legislative changes in Westminster will be made in the 2012 Finance Bill, the draft clauses of which have been published for consultation. I would expect this to have Royal Assent by early autumn and a Legislative Consent Motion will be required to seek Assembly agreement in this regard.

Following that, an Assembly Bill will be required to enable the Executive to follow through on the commitment to reduce Air Passenger Duty to zero.

## Civil Service: Pensions

**Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the proposed changes to the Northern Ireland Civil Service Pension Schemes.

**(AQO 1613/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** There are two proposed changes to the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme in Northern Ireland.

Firstly, in line with the decision by the Executive on 22 September 2011 on the proposals for increasing member contributions for public service pension schemes, and, following a formal consultation, employee contributions will be increased with effect from April 2012 for the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme in Northern Ireland.

Secondly, on 8 March 2012 the Executive agreed to wider reform proposals for public service pension schemes. This will mean a move from final salary to career average pension scheme, with the Normal Retirement Age linked to State Pension Age.

## Consultants: Spend

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what checks his Department has in place to monitor spending on consultants.

**(AQO 1615/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** My Department issues guidance on the Use of External Consultants which provides a framework for establishing the need for, and the procurement and management of external consultants - but the decision to incur expenditure on external consultants is a matter for individual departments and ministers. In addition, my Department commissions an annual exercise from departments in order to monitor compliance with the DFP guidance, and the results of this exercise are published annually. The most recent report, in respect of the 2010-11 financial year, was published in February 2012.

It noted that in 2010-11 the total spend on external consultancy across departments and their Arms Length Bodies was less than £16 million. This was a reduction of 56% from the level reported in 2007-08. Looking forward, as part of Budget 2011-2015 the Executive set a target of year-on-year reductions of 10% for external consultancy spend over this budget period and a drop of 56% therefore shows the significant level of reduction already achieved.

All proposed external consultancy spend of £10,000 or above now requires the specific prior approval of the relevant Minister. Individual Ministers remain free to lower this threshold even further within their own departments as they may see fit.

## External Consultants: Non-ministerial Departments

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department holds information on the external consultancy projects undertaken by non-ministerial departments.

**(AQO 1616/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** My Department requests returns from all Departments, on an annual basis, as regards the use of external consultants. This information is collated and published in DFP's Annual Compliance Report on the Use of External Consultants. My Department also requests this information from the non-ministerial Departments, that is: the Assembly Ombudsman/Commissioner for Complaints, the Foods Standards Agency; the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service. The Northern Ireland Audit Office is the only body which declines to take part in this exercise.

## Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the work currently being undertaken by the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit.

**(AQO 1617/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The work of the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) is currently focused on the delivery strand of the unit's remit following the recent completion of two major reviews in respect of the Education and Health & Social Care sectors.

In particular, PEDU has worked closely with officials in OFMDFM to put in place robust monitoring arrangements to drive delivery of the new Programme for Government (PfG), covering the period 2011-15. The first stage of this work involved the development of a Delivery Framework covering all aspects of planning, monitoring and reporting. This was agreed by the Executive on 9 February 2012. There is now ongoing engagement with departments on the production of Delivery Plans for each commitment, which build on and clarify the milestones and outputs contained in the PfG 2011-15 document.

Going forward, PEDU will continue to be closely involved in the PfG monitoring process, and in accordance with its remit, the unit will provide support to departments seeking to constructively address performance issues.

## Welfare Reform

**Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the issue of welfare reform and its implications for the local economy were discussed at the recent meeting with Treasury.

**(AQO 1618/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** I assume the Member is referring to the recent 5th March 2012 meeting of Devolved Administration Finance Ministers and HM Treasury Ministers. The agenda for this meeting included employment, infrastructure, local pay and pension reform issues. However, at this meeting I also took the opportunity to express concern about the localisation of Council Tax benefit and the impact that this will have in Northern Ireland.

In terms of the wider welfare reform agenda, the Member will be aware that the Executive has established a sub-group to consider the issues involved. There is also ongoing engagement with relevant Whitehall departments at ministerial and official level.

## Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit: Social Disadvantage

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit has looked at measures and targets within Departments in relation to tackling social disadvantage.

**(AQO 1619/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) has not previously been asked to examine departmental measures and targets aimed at tackling social disadvantage. However, as part of the unit's broader work on monitoring progress against Programme for Government (PfG) 2008-11, PEDU did prepare a delivery assessment to inform an accountability review on progress against the child poverty targets.

# Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

## Prisoners: Hospital Trips

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the average number of weekly prisoner trips to local hospitals; and (ii) the number of hospital trips made by each prisoner in the last 12 months.

**(AQW 9237/11-15)**

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** In the 12 months from February 2011 to February 2012 there were an average of 17 trips to hospital per week.

It has not been possible to determine the number of trips by each prisoner. However, a total of 909 prisoners were escorted to hospital in the 12 months between February 2011 and February 2012.

## Health Promotion

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) as a percentage of the overall budget, how much his Department currently spends on health promotion; (ii) how much his Department has spent on health promotion in each of the last three years; (iii) how much his Department intends to spend on health promotion in the next three years; and (iv) whether his Department is aware of the comparative statistics on the percentage of the health budget spent on health promotion in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

**(AQW 9242/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:**

(i) & (ii)

Health Promotion expenditure for the 2011/12 financial year is not yet available. The expenditure for the financial years 2009/10 and 2010/11 amounted to £94 million and £89 million respectively, representing approximately 2.3% and 2.1% of the Department's current budget allocation in those years (and reflecting spend by the Trusts, Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care Board). However, total overall spend on Health Promotion activities will be greater than this, as it is inherent within and across all aspects of health and social care provision in Northern Ireland.

- (iii) My commitment to increasing public health expenditure is evident in the Programme for Government. I will invest an additional £5m, £7.5m and £10m over the three years to 2014/15 through the Public Health Agency when compared to their actual spend in 2011/12. In addition, I plan to have the new Public Health Strategic Framework in place by the end of 2012.
- (iv) We cannot directly compare health promotion expenditure with other UK administrations. Budgets associated with such outcomes are, by their very nature, delivered through a wide and differing range of hospital and social care solutions making true and direct comparisons problematic.

### Hospitality: Spend

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8074/11-15, whether the figures provided include his Department's arm's-length bodies; and if not, to provide this information for each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9265/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I can confirm that my answer to AQW 8074/11-15 did not include information in respect of arm's length bodies. Information on hospitality expenditure within each of my Department's arm's length bodies is provided in the following table:

|                                | 2006/07<br>£k  | 2007/08<br>£k | 2008/09<br>£k | 2009/10<br>£k | 2010/11<br>£k |
|--------------------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Belfast Trust                  | *Not available | 35.0          | 12.0          | 15.0          | 15.0          |
| Northern Trust                 | *Not available | 34.6          | 43.6          | 18.2          | 14.0          |
| Southern Trust                 | *Not available | 62.0          | 67.0          | 38.71         | 15.5          |
| South Eastern Trust            | *Not available | 97.5          | 133.7         | 109.7         | 38.5          |
| Western Trust                  | *Not available | 109.2         | 86.3          | 52.41         | 9.5           |
| NIAS                           | 3.1            | 4.3           | 8.7           | 3.2           | 4.5           |
| Business Services Organisation | 19.8           | 17.8          | 25.3          | 28.0          | 20.3          |
| Health and Social Care Board   | ^n/a           | 112.5         | 92.0          | 65.2          | 65.5          |
| Public Health Agency           | ^n/a           | 37.5          | 62.0          | 22.1          | 49.9          |
| PCC                            | ^n/a           | ^n/a          | ^n/a          | 0.4           | 6.4           |
| NIFRS                          | 14.0           | 24.7          | 60.3          | 58.0          | 45.3          |
| NIPEC                          | 3.6            | 5.1           | 3.4           | 2.1           | 1.8           |
| NISCC                          | 14.4           | 13.8          | 18.5          | 20.5          | 31.4          |
| NIGALA                         | 0.9            | 2.8           | 1.3           | 2.4           | 1.0           |
| NIBTS                          | 3.8            | 3.3           | 4.3           | 3.3           | 1.4           |
| RQIA                           | 15.8           | 10.5          | 10.6          | 10.7          | 7.8           |
| NIMDTA                         | 13.0           | 12.21         | 11.51         | 11.31         | 6.2           |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>n/a</b>     | <b>582.79</b> | <b>640.54</b> | <b>461.16</b> | <b>334.0</b>  |

\* Trusts were re-organised on 1 April 2007 under the Review of Public Administration and information in respect of the old Trusts can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

^ These bodies were formed on 1 April 2009 but information is available for some of the bodies which operated prior to 1 April 2009.

1 Following review, these figures have now been updated from the previous public information.

Due to the wide ranging operational nature of the Department's ALBs, hospitality may also include other expenditure associated with the provision of refreshments, for example room hire and equipment hire

### Community-based Initiatives: Funding

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total level of funding his Department allocated for community based initiatives in 2007/08; 2008/09; 2009/10; and 2010/11 in the (i) Erne North; (ii) Erne West; and (iii) Erne East wards in Co Fermanagh.

**(AQW 9275/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** It is not possible to provide this information by ward, as funding is not allocated on this basis.

However, Funding allocated by the HSC Board and Western HSC Trust to voluntary and community organisations which are located in or are providing a service or community initiative to the Fermanagh and Omagh areas, was as follows:

|      | <b>2010-11</b><br>£ | <b>2009-10</b><br>£ | <b>2008-09</b><br>£ | <b>2007-08</b><br>£ |
|------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| HSCB | 655,837             | 696,961             | 600,033             | 683,891             |
| WHST | 4,528,226           | 3,480,013           | 3,703,267           | 3,676,413           |

No other Trust has allocated funding to any voluntary or community organisation in the Fermanagh area or for any community initiative in the area.

### Food Safety Promotion Board: Staff Community Background

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 1254/11-15, to detail the outcome of the monitoring of the community background of staff in the Food Safety Promotion Board.

**(AQW 9357/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** None of the North-South Implementation Bodies has historically monitored the community background of its southern based employees.

At present the Food Safety Promotion Board employs 29 staff, all of whom are based in the Republic of Ireland. Acting on legal advice FSPB has not asked individual employees to state their 'community background'. In the absence of a direct question method or any reliable proxy indicator of employees' perceived religious affiliation, the Chief Executive of FSPB indicated in August 2011 that he was of the view that the community background of the staff complement of FSPB broadly reflected the general community, taking account of location and the disciplines and professions within the organisation.

### MRI Scanner: Royal Victoria Hospital

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 8481/11-15, to detail (i) how many children required an MRI scan in 2010; (ii) how many adults are currently waiting for an MRI scan in each Health and Social Care Trust area; and the current average waiting time; (iii) how many children are currently waiting for an MRI scan in each Trust area, and the current average waiting time; (iv) the provisions that are in place for children who require an MRI scan in each Trust area; and (v) what action he is taking to reduce the waiting time for an MRI scan.

**(AQW 9387/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:**

- (i) I have been informed by the Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland, that a total of 1,892 children received an MRI scan during 2010.
- (ii) MRI waiting time data are collected in aggregate time bands; therefore it is not possible to calculate an average waiting time. It is, however, possible to calculate the median time band, a similar statistical measure.

The number of adults currently waiting for an MRI scan at each HSC Trust, and the median waiting time band, is outlined in the table below:

| <b>HSC Trust</b> | <b>No. adults currently waiting for MRI scan<sup>1</sup></b> | <b>Median waiting time band (weeks)</b> |
|------------------|--|---|
| Belfast          | 1,751  | 6-9 weeks                               |
| Northern         | 286  | 0-6 weeks                               |
| South Eastern    | 912  | 0-6 weeks                               |
| Southern         | 847  | 0-6 weeks                               |
| Western          | 429  | 0-6 weeks                               |
| Northern Ireland | 4,225  | 0-6 weeks                               |

**Source:** HSC Trusts

- (iii) The number of children currently waiting for an MRI scan at each HSC Trust, and the median waiting time band, is outlined in the table below:

| HSC Trust        | No. children currently waiting for MRI scan <sup>1</sup> | Median waiting time band (weeks) |
|------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Belfast          | 332  | 6-9 weeks                        |
| Northern         | 11   | 0-6 weeks                        |
| South Eastern    | 17   | 0-6 weeks                        |
| Southern         | 72   | 0-6 weeks                        |
| Western          | 58   | 0-6 weeks                        |
| Northern Ireland | 490  | 6-9 weeks                        |

**Source:** HSC Trusts

- 1 Children are categorised as patients aged between 0 and 16 years of age, with adults categorised as patients over 16 years of age.

- (iv) The provisions that are in place for children who require an MRI scan in each Trust are detailed in the table below:

| HSC Trust     | Provision in place for Children who require an MRI scan  |
|---------------|--|
| Belfast       | There are a total of 7 scanners within the Belfast Trust. The majority of children receive their scan within the Imaging Centre of the RVH as this is the only facility with a scanner equipped with the provision to administer General Anaesthetic (GA) scans to those children who require it.  |
| Northern      | Children as with adults may receive MRI scans at the Northern Trust's MRI scanner at Antrim Area Hospital. Children from 3 months old to 5 years old who are suitable for sedation can also be accommodated at this facility.<br><br>However children requiring GA MRI scans are referred by their GP directly to the Belfast Trust as the Northern Trust does not provide a GA service.   |
| South Eastern | The Trust provides a GA MRI scan session every 2 weeks. Three children are usually imaged during this session. The associated appointment slots are protected and the appointments are categorised as planned. The average waiting time for this examination type is usually 4 to 5 weeks.   |
| Southern      | The Trust's Radiology Department do not attempt to scan babies from 3 months to children of 6 years – they are referred to the Belfast Trust. The Southern Trust's Radiology Department are able to perform scans for neonates where they 'wrap and feed' so that the baby lies still for the scan. The Trust's Radiology Department do attempt to scan children from 6 years up to see if they will lie still enough for the scan, if not they are also referred to the Belfast Trust for GA scans, as the Southern Trust does not routinely give sedation to children. |
| Western       | The Trust currently provides access for MRI scans for all patients in the catchment area regardless of age. In order to facilitate scanning of children who cannot co-operate the Trust offers an MRI GA service in Altnagelvin Hospital.<br><br>GA scanning occurs on two mornings per month with additional sessions being created as and when required to stay within the 9 week waiting time standard. The Trust expects no child to have waited more than 9 weeks for an MRI scan by the end of March 2012.   |

- (v) The action being taken by each Trust to reduce the waiting time for an MRI scan is detailed in the table below:

| HSC Trust | Action taken to reduce waiting time for an MRI scan  |
|-----------|--|
| Belfast   | There are four GA MRI scan lists provided per week. In addition to this, there is non-recurrent funding from the HSCB to perform additional general anaesthetic lists during weekends. This funding has been extended into quarter one of 2012/13. |

| HSC Trust     | Action taken to reduce waiting time for an MRI scan   |
|---------------|---|
| Northern      | <p>All patients requiring an MRI scan receive their scan within the 9 week waiting time standard. Up to 30 additional unfunded sessions per month are required to meet current demand on the single Northern Trust Scanner. The Trust's Radiology Service has completed Investment Proposal Cases for:</p> <p>i 4 additional MRI weekend sessions; and</p> <p>ii. 2 breast and biopsy sessions per week</p> <p>The radiology department is finalising a major capital and revenue business case for a second MRI scanner in Antrim Hospital, including the provision of GA and Breast MRI services.</p>   |
| South Eastern | <p>The Trust has implemented various initiatives in order to reduce outpatient waiting times. These include:</p> <p>i The implementation of 4 seamless working days each week (funded by non recurrent waiting list initiative).</p> <p>ii. The implementation of 4 to 5 evening sessions each week (funded by non recurrent waiting list initiative).</p> <p>iii. During Consultant annual leave/study leave, MRI radiographers undertake unsupervised sessions, working to approved protocols.</p> <p>iv. The Trust is currently in discussion with the HSCB regarding the possibility of expanding MRI capacity through a second scanner.</p>  |
| Southern      | <p>The Southern HSC Trust is taking no additional action to reduce the waiting time for an MRI scan as Trust end of year performance is anticipated to be within the 2011/12 9 week waiting time standard.</p>  |
| Western       | <p>There are a number of initiatives being taken forward by the Trust which may reduce MRI scan waiting times for children. These are:</p> <p>I. An extended working day on the scanner in Altnagelvin. This includes evenings, and Saturday and Sundays when required.</p> <p>II. The Trust has a contractual arrangement with an Independent Service provider to deliver MRI scanning in the Erne Hospital for the local population and also the population of the whole trust to minimise waiting times. This service will run to 15 June 2012.</p> <p>III. A new MRI scanner will be operational in the Southwest Acute Hospital from 21 June 2012.</p> <p>IV. The Trust is currently developing plans with the HSCB to install a second MRI scanner on the Altnagelvin site to deal with the increase in demand as well as ensure resilience of services</p> |

### Cancer Patients: East Antrim

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of cancer patients (i) who are receiving treatment; and (ii) who have died in each of the last three years, in the East Antrim area, broken down by electoral ward. **(AQW 9432/11-15)**

#### Mr Poots:

- (i) Table A below outlines the number of cancer patients<sup>1</sup> who received surgery, chemotherapy and/ or radiotherapy in the years 2007-2009 in East Antrim Assembly Area by Electoral Ward. For patient confidentiality reasons, the years have been grouped. The figures have been supplied by the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry and are the most up to date available.
- (ii) Table B below outlines the number of deaths registered due to cancer<sup>1</sup> in East Antrim Assembly Area for each year between 2008 and 2010 by Electoral Ward. The figures have been supplied by the General Registry's Office and relates to the year of registration of death.

<sup>1</sup> The ICD10 codes used to classify cancer are C00-C97. For a listing and explanation of ICD-10 codes see International Classification of Diseases for Oncology, 3rd Edition, World Health Organisation, Geneva, 2000. For an explanation of ICD-10 codes see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_ICD-10\\_codes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ICD-10_codes).

**Table A: The number of cancer patients<sup>1</sup> who received treatment within 12 months of diagnosis in the years 2007-2009 in East Antrim Parliamentary Constituency, by Electoral Ward**

| <b>Electoral Ward Code</b> | <b>Electoral Ward Name</b> | <b>Number receiving treatment*</b> |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 95HH01                     | Blackhead                  | 31                                 |
| 95HH02                     | Bluefield                  | 28                                 |
| 95HH03                     | Boneybefore                | 24                                 |
| 95HH04                     | Burleigh Hill              | 34                                 |
| 95HH05                     | Clipperstown               | 20                                 |
| 95HH06                     | Eden                       | 41                                 |
| 95HH07                     | Gortalee                   | 25                                 |
| 95HH08                     | Greenisland                | 25                                 |
| 95HH09                     | Killycrot                  | 42                                 |
| 95HH10                     | Knockagh                   | 24                                 |
| 95HH11                     | Love Lane                  | 18                                 |
| 95HH12                     | Milebush                   | 20                                 |
| 95HH13                     | Northland                  | 15                                 |
| 95HH14                     | Sunnylands                 | 29                                 |
| 95HH15                     | Victoria                   | 37                                 |
| 95HH16                     | Whitehead                  | 28                                 |
| 95HH17                     | Woodburn                   | 30                                 |
| 95QQ01                     | Antiville                  | 15                                 |
| 95QQ02                     | Ballycarry                 | 19                                 |
| 95QQ03                     | Ballyloran                 | 13                                 |
| 95QQ04                     | Blackcave                  | 14                                 |
| 95QQ05                     | Carncastle                 | 38                                 |
| 95QQ06                     | Carnlough                  | 19                                 |
| 95QQ07                     | Central                    | 34                                 |
| 95QQ08                     | Craigy Hill                | 26                                 |
| 95QQ09                     | Gardenmore                 | 34                                 |
| 95QQ10                     | Glenarm                    | 25                                 |
| 95QQ11                     | Glynn                      | 19                                 |
| 95QQ12                     | Harbour                    | 23                                 |
| 95QQ13                     | Island Magee               | 36                                 |
| 95QQ14                     | Kilwaughter                | 46                                 |
| 95QQ15                     | Town Parks                 | 22                                 |
| 95UU08                     | Glemaan                    | 13                                 |
| 95UU09                     | Glenariff                  | 21                                 |
| 95UU10                     | Glendun                    | 11                                 |
| 95WW19                     | Jordanstown                | 58                                 |

| Electoral Ward Code | Electoral Ward Name | Number receiving treatment* |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| 95WW21              | Monkstown           | 40                          |
| 95WW23              | Rostulla            | 41                          |

\* Treatments consisted of surgery, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy

**Table B: Number of registered deaths due to cancer<sup>1</sup> in East Antrim Assembly Area for each year between 2008 and 2010 by Electoral Ward.**

| Ward Code | Ward Name     | Registration Year |      |      |
|-----------|---------------|-------------------|------|------|
|           |               | 2008              | 2009 | 2010 |
| 95HH01    | Blackhead     | 10                | 4    | 7    |
| 95HH02    | Bluefield     | 2                 | 2    | 4    |
| 95HH03    | Boneybefore   | 4                 | 6    | 5    |
| 95HH04    | Burleigh Hill | 1                 | 5    | 6    |
| 95HH05    | Clipperstown  | 6                 | 4    | 5    |
| 95HH06    | Eden          | 8                 | 8    | 4    |
| 95HH07    | Gortalee      | 6                 | 3    | 4    |
| 95HH08    | Greenisland   | 5                 | 3    | 7    |
| 95HH09    | Killycrot     | 7                 | 10   | 5    |
| 95HH10    | Knockagh      | 6                 | 3    | 2    |
| 95HH11    | Love Lane     | 4                 | 4    | 8    |
| 95HH12    | Milebush      | 3                 | 4    | 8    |
| 95HH13    | Northland     | 1                 | 3    | 3    |
| 95HH14    | Sunnylands    | 7                 | 4    | 8    |
| 95HH15    | Victoria      | 5                 | 10   | 7    |
| 95HH16    | Whitehead     | 5                 | 2    | 13   |
| 95HH17    | Woodburn      | 5                 | 4    | 7    |
| 95QQ01    | Antville      | 5                 | 6    | 2    |
| 95QQ02    | Ballycarry    | 6                 | 5    | 5    |
| 95QQ03    | Ballyloran    | 6                 | 3    | 3    |
| 95QQ04    | Blackcave     | 5                 | 7    | 8    |
| 95QQ05    | Carncastle    | 8                 | 2    | 7    |
| 95QQ06    | Carnlough     | 5                 | 6    | 5    |
| 95QQ07    | Central       | 12                | 8    | 10   |
| 95QQ08    | Craigy Hill   | 3                 | 7    | 10   |
| 95QQ09    | Gardenmore    | 6                 | 12   | 11   |
| 95QQ10    | Glenarm       | 5                 | 2    | 6    |
| 95QQ11    | Glynn         | 7                 | 4    | 6    |
| 95QQ12    | Harbour       | 8                 | 3    | 7    |
| 95QQ13    | Island Magee  | 8                 | 8    | 4    |
| 95QQ14    | Kilwaughter   | 10                | 2    | 6    |



| Ward Code | Ward Name   | Registration Year |      |      |
|-----------|-------------|-------------------|------|------|
|           |             | 2008              | 2009 | 2010 |
| 95QQ15    | Town Parks  | 1                 | 6    | 3    |
| 95UU08    | Glemaan     | 4                 | 3    | 1    |
| 95UU09    | Glenariff   | 2                 | 4    | 3    |
| 95UU10    | Glendun     | 3                 | 3    | 4    |
| 95WW19    | Jordanstown | 8                 | 9    | 13   |
| 95WW21    | Monkstown   | 6                 | 5    | 9    |
| 95WW23    | Rostulla    | 10                | 11   | 6    |

### Woodland: UK Forestry Standard

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether all the bodies or organisations within his Department's remit which own woodland are compliant with the UK Forestry Standard, including his Department, any arm's-length body and any organisation to which his Department provides grant aid.

**(AQW 9439/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** All HSC bodies that own areas of woodland apply appropriate land management for these woodland areas as outlined in my Department's guidance 'Land Management for the Conservation and Creation of Biodiversity in Health, Social Care and Public Safety (HSC&PS) Estates'. This guidance document broadly covers the same principles as the UK Forestry Standard. The update of the Departmental guidance will fully reflect all aspects of the UK Forestry Standard.

### Human Papilloma Virus: Screening

**Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) where women can be tested for the Human Papilloma Virus; (ii) whether testing is available for all women; and (iii) whether his Department has any plans to include the test as part of the NI Cervical Screening Programme.

**(AQW 9444/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** HPV testing is not currently part of the cervical screening programme in Northern Ireland, however, the Western HSC Trust is using HPV testing on a pilot basis as part of cervical screening. This will provide useful information on the implications of introducing such a test on a wider scale in Northern Ireland.

In the other Trust areas, HPV testing is one of a number of diagnostic tests that can be used for second line investigation of specific conditions. A decision whether to refer a sample from a patient for the HPV test will be made on the basis of the individual case and clinical judgement.

The potential role of HPV testing within the NI Cervical Screening Programme was considered in May 2011 by the Northern Ireland Screening Committee (NISC) which is chaired by the Chief Medical Officer. The Public Health Agency has been developing proposals and associated costs for introducing HPV testing into the Programme, and these were considered by NISC in January 2012. The UK National Screening Committee (NSC) is due to consider HPV testing at a meeting in April 2012 and NISC has recommended that the Department should await the NSC recommendations before decisions are taken on the introduction of HPV testing into the Northern Ireland Cervical Screening Programme.

### Human Papilloma Virus: Diagnosis and Treatment

**Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many women have been diagnosed and treated for the Human Papilloma Virus in each of the last five years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

**(AQW 9445/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The number of women diagnosed and treated for the Human Papilloma Virus is not available.

Information on a number of STI diagnoses is published by the Public Health Agency and can be found at the following link:

[http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/HIV\\_and\\_STI\\_Report\\_12\\_2011.pdf](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/HIV_and_STI_Report_12_2011.pdf)

### Human Papilloma Virus: Diagnostic Tests

**Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety under what circumstances a woman would be tested for the Human Papilloma Virus; and whether this varies across each Health and Social Care Trust area.

**(AQW 9446/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** HPV testing is one of a number of diagnostic tests that can be used for second line investigation of specific conditions. A decision whether to refer a sample from a patient for a HPV test will be made on the basis of clinical judgement on the individual case. Such decisions will therefore vary from case to case and will not necessarily vary significantly between geographical areas.

HPV testing is not currently part of the cervical screening programme in Northern Ireland. The Western HSC Trust is using HPV testing as part of the cervical screening programme on a pilot basis. This will provide useful information on the implications of introducing such a test on a wider scale in Northern Ireland.

### Cervical Cancer: Screening

**Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many women between the age of 25 and 49 are currently overdue their regular cervical screening appointment; and what is the average length of time since their last appointment.

**(AQW 9450/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Women who are eligible for cervical cancer screening in Northern Ireland are sent reminders when their next cervical screening test is due. It is then the responsibility of the woman to make an appointment with her GP or a family planning clinic to have the test carried out. The screening programme does not issue appointments.

Until January 2011, women aged 25 to 49 years were recommended to have a cervical screening test every 5 years. From January 2011, this recommendation has changed to every 3 years. It should be noted that it will take 3 years for this change in practice to be fully implemented, therefore current data relates to a five year screening interval.

Given this service delivery model, it is not technically accurate to estimate the number of women overdue a regular cervical screening appointment. It is possible, however, to present an estimate of the number of eligible women who have not undergone adequate cervical screening in Northern Ireland during the last five years.

These data are estimated based on coverage, for example, the percentage of eligible women with an adequate screening result recorded in last five years. The position at 31st October 2011, the most recent position for which robust data are available, are outlined in the table below.

| Eligible Northern Ireland population aged 25 to 49 years | Number and percentage of eligible women with an adequate screening test result in the last 5 years | Number and percentage of eligible women with no adequate screening test result in the last 5 years |
|--|--|--|
| 334,112  | 262,698 (78.6%)  | 71,414 (21.4%)   |

**Source:** Quality Assurance Reference Centre (Public Health Agency)

Information on the average length of time between cervical screening tests is not available.

### Fire Stations: Refurbishments/Newbuilds

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which fire stations have undergone major refurbishments or have had capital new builds in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 9527/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** All Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) Fire Stations meet the general requirements of the Health & Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978. Each NIFRS workplace is subject to a 6-monthly health & safety audit and workplace audits are carried out by competent NIFRS personnel.

The table shows the total cost of the project against the year in which the project was completed. In some cases, the expenditure was incurred across more than one year.

| Year    | Project         | Total Cost (£M's) |
|---------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 2011/12 | Rathfriland FRS | 0.8               |
| 2010/11 | None            | Nil               |
| 2009/10 | None            | Nil               |
| 2008/09 | None            | Nil               |
| 2007/08 | Rathlin FRS     | 0.19              |
| 2006/07 | None            | Nil               |
| 2005/06 | Enniskillen FRS | 0.42              |
| 2004/05 | Knock FRS       | 0.32              |

| Year    | Project              | Total Cost (£M's) |
|---------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 2004/05 | Lisnaskea FRS        | 0.12              |
| 2003/04 | None                 | Nil               |
| 2002/03 | Glengormley District | 0.25              |

The table shows the total cost of the project against the year in which the project was completed. In some cases, the expenditure was incurred across more than one year.

| Year    | Project    | Total Cost (£M's) |
|---------|------------|-------------------|
| 2011/12 | Omagh FRS  | 0.5               |
| 2010/11 | Armagh FRS | 2.719             |
| 2009/10 | None       | Nil               |
| 2008/09 | None       | Nil               |
| 2007/08 | None       | Nil               |
| 2006/07 | None       | Nil               |
| 2005/06 | None       | Nil               |
| 2004/05 | None       | Nil               |
| 2003/04 | None       | Nil               |
| 2002/03 | None       | Nil               |

**Note:** The total cost of the Omagh project is £5.619m, of which £500k is in 2011/12.

### Fire Stations: Health and Safety Standards

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which fire stations do not meet health and safety standards; and how often this is monitored.

**(AQW 9528/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** All Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) Fire Stations meet the general requirements of the Health & Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978. Each NIFRS workplace is subject to a 6-monthly health & safety audit and workplace audits are carried out by competent NIFRS personnel.

The table shows the total cost of the project against the year in which the project was completed. In some cases, the expenditure was incurred across more than one year.

| Year    | Project              | Total Cost (£M's) |
|---------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 2011/12 | Rathfriland FRS      | 0.8               |
| 2010/11 | None                 | Nil               |
| 2009/10 | None                 | Nil               |
| 2008/09 | None                 | Nil               |
| 2007/08 | Rathlin FRS          | 0.19              |
| 2006/07 | None                 | Nil               |
| 2005/06 | Enniskillen FRS      | 0.42              |
| 2004/05 | Knock FRS            | 0.32              |
| 2004/05 | Lisnaskea FRS        | 0.12              |
| 2003/04 | None                 | Nil               |
| 2002/03 | Glengormley District | 0.25              |

The table shows the total cost of the project against the year in which the project was completed. In some cases, the expenditure was incurred across more than one year.

| Year    | Project    | Total Cost (£M's) |
|---------|------------|-------------------|
| 2011/12 | Omagh FRS  | 0.5               |
| 2010/11 | Armagh FRS | 2.719             |
| 2009/10 | None       | Nil               |
| 2008/09 | None       | Nil               |
| 2007/08 | None       | Nil               |
| 2006/07 | None       | Nil               |
| 2005/06 | None       | Nil               |
| 2004/05 | None       | Nil               |
| 2003/04 | None       | Nil               |
| 2002/03 | None       | Nil               |

**Note:** The total cost of the Omagh project is £5.619m, of which £500k is in 2011/12.

### Healthcare Workers: Code of Dignity

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the benefits of a signed Code of Dignity for health workers caring for elderly patients.

**(AQW 9534/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The concept of treating all patients, irrespective of their age, with dignity and respect at all times is integral to the training of all healthcare professionals. All registered professions have very clear Codes of Conduct built into the regulatory requirements, and all registrants must maintain those standards in order to remain on their professional register. I remain to be convinced about the value of a Code of Dignity for a specific group of patients over and above these arrangements.

### Fire and Rescue Service: Business Services Organisation Report

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he will have (i) within his own Department; and (ii) with the Assembly Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety regarding the recent report by the Business Service Organisation into the Fire and Rescue Service.

**(AQW 9551/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I have requested the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to submit the Business Service Organisation's report as soon as possible. Once I have had an opportunity to consider it, I shall ensure that the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee is briefed appropriately.

### HEMS/Air Ambulance

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the need for an air ambulance to cover the geographical northern half of the island of Ireland.

**(AQW 9554/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I can only comment about health and social care provision in Northern Ireland. I can confirm that, at my predecessor's request, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) commissioned consultants to undertake a feasibility study on the need for and sustainability and affordability of an HEMS/air ambulance for Northern Ireland. The HSCB expects the consultants to present a final report in April this year after which it will be submitted to my Department to consider.

In the meantime, the Department's policy remains that investment to modernise ground ambulance services to provide the best possible response to people in life threatening situations must be a priority.

Once the HSCB feasibility study is available, I will assess its conclusions and decide if the Department's existing policy should be revised.

## Paediatric Surgery: Anaesthetist Services

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a second anaesthetist is on site on every occasion when day-case paediatric surgery is carried out.

**(AQW 9562/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The deployment of medical staff within the Western HSC Trust is an operational matter for the Trust. I am advised by the Trust that following a clinical incident on 22nd February, it was decided that pending a full incident review two anaesthetists would be required on site to strengthen clinical support during paediatric surgery.

The Trust has advised that during paediatric surgery at Altnagelvin and Erne hospitals, 2 anaesthetists are on site and that paediatric surgery continues at the Tyrone County Hospital when a second anaesthetist is on site.

## Hospitals: Hygiene Standards

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) who is responsible for setting the hygiene standards for each hospital; (ii) how these standards have been set; and (iii) who is responsible for checking the hygiene standards for each hospital.

**(AQW 9563/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:**

- i. Hygiene and environmental cleanliness standards are set regionally by the Department of Health Social, Services and Public Safety, (with the Minister having overall responsibility).
- ii. Environmental cleanliness standards have been set out in "Cleanliness Matters 2005-2008 - A Regional Strategy for Improving the Standard of Environmental Cleanliness in HSS Trusts". Hygiene standards, which include hand washing, patient linen, waste and sharps, patient equipment, general environment, hygiene facilities, organisational systems and governance, and hygiene practices, have been set out in "Regional Healthcare Hygiene and Cleanliness Standards" which was issued to Trusts in July 2011.
- iii. For environment cleanliness, daily checks and departmental (ward) audits are the responsibility of the ward manager. Managerial audits are the responsibility of a team consisting of senior management from cleaning services, estates and nursing. These may also include ward managers, infection control professionals and service users. Trust internal audit staff may also audit a sample of areas as part of the yearly Controls Assurance Standard process; compliance with the Controls assurance Standards is signed off by Trust Chief Executives. Ward managers are responsible for hygiene checks/ audits; arrangements are in place to ensure that issues are addressed in a timely and effective manner as set out in the "Regional Healthcare Hygiene and Cleanliness Standards". The Regional Quality and Improvement Authority carry out announced or unannounced inspections of hygiene and cleanliness and use the Regional Healthcare Hygiene and Cleanliness Tool as part of those inspections.

## Hospitals: Hygiene Standards

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the process of remediation, should it be discovered that hygiene standards in a hospital or on a ward have not been met.

**(AQW 9564/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** In relation to environmental cleanliness, the DHSSPS "Cleanliness Matters 2005-2008 - A Regional Strategy for Improving the Standard of Environmental Cleanliness in HSS Trusts" sets out the timescales for rectifying cleaning problems identified in an audit as follows.

| Priority  | Timeframe for rectifying problem  |
|---|---|
| A) Constant – Cleaning critical (very high risk and high risk functional areas)                             | Immediately, or as soon as is practically possible. Where domestic/ cleaning staff are not on duty this should be the responsibility of other ward or department personnel and these responsibilities should be clearly set out and understood. |
| B) Frequent – Cleaning important and requires maintaining (significant risk functional areas).              | 0-3 hours for patient areas (to be rectified by daily scheduled cleaning service for non-patient areas)   |
| C) Regular – On a less frequent scheduled basis, and as required between cleans (low risk functional areas) | 0-48 hours  |

In relation to hygiene, which includes hand washing, patient linen, waste and sharps, patient equipment, general environment, hygiene facilities, organisational systems and governance, and hygiene practices, Trusts are required to have robust arrangements in place to ensure that issues identified during internal monitoring and audit are addressed in a timely and effective manner. These should include lines of accountability and escalation as set out in the DHSSPS "Regional Healthcare Hygiene and Cleanliness Standards" which were issued to Trusts in July 2011.

## Hospitals: Hygiene Standards

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the standard process that is used to check hospital hygiene standards, including details of any microbiological tests that are routinely carried out as part of this process.  
(AQW 9565/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** In relation to environmental cleanliness, daily checks and departmental (ward) audits are carried out by ward managers based on 49 elements (surfaces, articles or fixtures) which have been defined in DHSSPS "Cleanliness Matters 2005-2008 - A Regional Strategy for Improving the Standard of Environmental Cleanliness in HSS Trusts", using a risk-based approach which sets out the risk category of each area. Managerial audits are carried out by a team consisting of senior management from cleaning services, estates and nursing. These may also include ward managers, infection control professionals and service users. All areas should be covered at least once a year. Trust internal audit staff may also audit a sample of areas as part of the yearly Controls Assurance Standard process. Compliance with the Controls assurance Standards is signed off by Trust Chief Executives. Ward managers are responsible for hygiene checks/audits; arrangements are in place to ensure that issues are addressed in a timely and effective manner as set out in the "Regional Healthcare Hygiene and Cleanliness Standards" which were issued to Trusts in July 2011.

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority also carry out announced or unannounced inspections of hygiene and cleanliness and use the Regional Healthcare Hygiene and Cleanliness Tool as part of those inspections.

Microbiological testing is not routinely carried out by Trusts but is carried out where an infection outbreak is suspected or confirmed.

## Fire Stations: Newbuilds

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on new builds for fire stations in each of the last ten years.  
(AQW 9575/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** All Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) Fire Stations meet the general requirements of the Health & Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978. Each NIFRS workplace is subject to a 6-monthly health & safety audit and workplace audits are carried out by competent NIFRS personnel.

The table shows the total cost of the project against the year in which the project was completed. In some cases, the expenditure was incurred across more than one year.

| Year    | Project              | Total Cost (£M's) |
|---------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 2011/12 | Rathfriland FRS      | 0.8               |
| 2010/11 | None                 | Nil               |
| 2009/10 | None                 | Nil               |
| 2008/09 | None                 | Nil               |
| 2007/08 | Rathlin FRS          | 0.19              |
| 2006/07 | None                 | Nil               |
| 2005/06 | Enniskillen FRS      | 0.42              |
| 2004/05 | Knock FRS            | 0.32              |
| 2004/05 | Lisnaskea FRS        | 0.12              |
| 2003/04 | None                 | Nil               |
| 2002/03 | Glengormley District | 0.25              |

The table shows the total cost of the project against the year in which the project was completed. In some cases, the expenditure was incurred across more than one year.

| Year    | Project    | Total Cost (£M's) |
|---------|------------|-------------------|
| 2011/12 | Omagh FRS  | 0.5               |
| 2010/11 | Armagh FRS | 2.719             |
| 2009/10 | None       | Nil               |
| 2008/09 | None       | Nil               |
| 2007/08 | None       | Nil               |

| Year    | Project | Total Cost (£M's) |
|---------|---------|-------------------|
| 2006/07 | None    | Nil               |
| 2005/06 | None    | Nil               |
| 2004/05 | None    | Nil               |
| 2003/04 | None    | Nil               |
| 2002/03 | None    | Nil               |

**Note:** The total cost of the Omagh project is £5.619m, of which £500k is in 2011/12.

### Medical Staff: Doctor/Nurse Positions

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) for each of the last three years, to detail (a) the number of qualified medical staff who, following an application for a position as a doctor or a nurse in the Health Service, were unsuccessful; (b) the average number of vacancies for junior doctors and nurses; and (c) the average number of hours per month that junior doctors and nurses have been required to work over and above their contracted hours; and (ii) the current number of vacancies for junior doctors and nurses; and (iii) the current number of qualified doctors and nurses who are seeking employment.

**(AQW 9628/11-15)**

#### i Mr Poots:

- a. The number of qualified medical staff who were unsuccessful in an application for a position as a doctor or nurse within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care over the last three years could only be provided at disproportionate cost.
- b. Information on the number of vacancies within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care is collected bi-annually (as at 31st March and 30th September) by means of a survey and is published on the Departmental web site at [http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats\\_research/workforce-statistics/stats-hsc.htm](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/workforce-statistics/stats-hsc.htm). The latest information available is 30th September 2011. The number of vacancies for doctors in training (Specialty Registrar and Foundation House Officer grades) and qualified nurses over the last three years is given below.

#### Number of current vacancies for doctors in training and qualified nurses – March 2009 to September 2011

| Date                | Doctors in Training |      | Qualified Nurses |       |
|---------------------|---------------------|------|------------------|-------|
|                     | Headcount           | WTE  | Headcount        | WTE   |
| 31st March 2009     | 50                  | 50.0 | 214              | 200.0 |
| 30th September 2009 | 39                  | 39.0 | 225              | 212.0 |
| 31st March 2010     | 41                  | 41.0 | 158              | 146.4 |
| 30th September 2010 | 19                  | 19.0 | 127              | 119.6 |
| 31st March 2011     | 28                  | 27.5 | 250              | 237.6 |
| 30th September 2011 | 34                  | 33.0 | 259              | 224.8 |

**Source:** Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Vacancy Survey

#### Notes:

WTE=Whole-time equivalent

A current vacancy is a post which at the survey date the organisation was trying to fill.

Medical Training grades are subject to high levels of turnover, therefore the vacancy levels can be subject to significant fluctuation throughout the year.

- c. The average number of hours per month that junior doctors and nurses have worked over and above their contracted hours could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Please note that extra hours are worked on a voluntary basis and not a required basis.
- ii. The latest information available (at 30th September 2011) on the number of vacancies is provided in the table above.
- iii. The number of qualified doctors and nurses who are seeking employment is not available.

### Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Facilities

**Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the adequacy of the facilities that are available to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder cases, given that the number of cases is likely to increase as a result of military personnel returning from active service.

**(AQW 9648/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** A recent study found that Northern Ireland has the highest level of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among all comparable studies undertaken across the world, including other areas of conflict.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is recognised as an effective treatment for PTSD. A Strategy for the Development of Psychological Therapies Strategy was published by my Department in 2010 and has been underpinned by an additional £4.4m per annum.

While it is not possible to quantify separately the resources provided by Health and Social Care services for the treatment of PTSD, in the year 2010/11 year £228 million was spent on specialist services for people with mental health problems. This does not include expenditure on primary care services and voluntary organisations which may treat and support patients with post traumatic stress disorder.

The adequacy of the facilities that are available to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder cases is primarily for the Health & Social Care Board to address as part of its commissioning role.

The Armed Forces Healthcare protocol ensures that Armed Forces personnel, their families and Veterans receive equality of access to health and social care services, including PTSD services, across Northern Ireland.

### Media Communications Protocols

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what media communications protocols exist between his Department and each of its arm's-length bodies; and to publish these protocols.

**(AQW 9659/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** There are no written media communications protocols between the Department of Health and each of its arm's length bodies. However, a number of planning, monitoring and alert arrangements are in place to support the flow of information in both directions.

### Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland: Judicial Review

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an estimate of the cost of the appeal against the decision of the judicial review brought by Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland.

**(AQW 9679/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** It is not possible to estimate how much the appeal against the decision of the judicial review brought by Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland will cost. The overall costs of the judicial review, including the costs of the appeal, will not be determined until all the legal processes are concluded and liability for costs has been decided by the Court of Appeal.

### Hospitals: Hygiene Audits

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he intends to take to ensure that hygiene audits of hospitals are completed on time and that the results are monitored so that issues are dealt with urgently.

**(AQW 9715/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The requirements for environmental cleanliness audits are defined in "Cleanliness Matters 2005-2008 – A Regional Strategy for Improving the Standard of Environmental Cleanliness in HSS Trusts". The responsibility for auditing and monitoring rests with the Health & Social Care Trusts. Trust internal audit staff may also audit a sample of areas as part of the yearly Controls Assurance Standard process. Compliance with the Controls Assurance Standard is signed off by Trust Chief Executives.

### Hospitals: Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority Inspections

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will grant enforcement powers to the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety so that it can request a Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority inspection of a hospital when it receives a serious complaint regarding hospital hygiene.

**(AQW 9717/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** It is not legally within my gift to add to or amend the function or powers of statutory committees of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 places a duty of quality on all HSC Trusts. As Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety I can require the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority to conduct reviews, inspections and investigations into the management, provision or quality of services for which statutory bodies and service providers have responsibility, and to make a report to me.

I have already exercised these powers in the past and will continue to do so in the future where and when it is warranted.



### **Children's Emergency Department: Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children**

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average waiting time for patients attending the Children's Emergency Department at The Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.

**(AQW 9720/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Information on the average waiting time for patients attending the Children's Emergency Department at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, information is available on the number of new and unplanned review attendances at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children according to specified time bands (Less than 4 hours, 4 to 12 hours and 12 hours or more), 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](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency_care-monthly_waiting_times.htm)

Provisional information for February 2012 indicates that 67.6% of new and unplanned attendances at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children were either treated and discharged home, or admitted within 4 hours, with 2 patients waiting over 12 hours.

### **Antrim Area Hospital: Public Health Agency Inspection**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the inspections/investigations carried out by the Public Health Agency into the Antrim Area Hospital in the last six months; (ii) the results or recommendations of any such inspections/investigations; and (iii) what follow-up actions, including management reviews, have been carried out and what conclusions have been communicated to the Northern Health and Social Services Trust and his Department.

**(AQW 9721/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The Public Health Agency has confirmed that it has not carried out any inspections/investigations into the Antrim Area Hospital in the last 6 months.

In January 2012 the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) asked the PHA to provide professional advice and support to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) for a 6 week period.

This support and assistance was provided by Mrs Mary Hinds, Director of Nursing at the PHA and had a particular focus on unscheduled care at Antrim Area Hospital.

Mrs Hinds has now concluded this work and is finalizing her report. I expect this report to be made available to the Department, the HSCB and the NHSCT shortly.

### **Antrim Area Hospital: Patient Discharges**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been kept in the Antrim Area Hospital since 1 January 2012 due to the absence of social support in the community; and how many nights, in total, the patients remained in hospital without medical necessity.

**(AQW 9735/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The information requested is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

My Department currently monitors information on delayed discharges from acute hospitals against the standard that:

'90% of complex discharges from an acute hospital setting take place within 48 hours of the decision to discharge; all non-complex discharges from an acute hospital setting take place within six hours of being declared medically fit; and, no discharge from an acute hospital setting takes longer than seven days.'

A delayed discharge refers to any patient remaining in hospital after the time they were deemed medically fit for discharge.

During February 2012, 15.6% (229) of patients with complex care needs waited longer than 48 hours to be discharged from an acute hospital setting following a decision to discharge and 4.1% (618) of patients with non-complex care needs waited longer than 6 hours. Of these delays (both complex and non-complex), 112 waited longer than 7 days.

### **Marian Price: Move to Hydebank Wood**

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he discussed the transfer of Marion McGlinchey to Hydebank Wood with the (i) Prison Service; and (ii) South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust prior to the transfer.

**(AQW 9740/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The decision to transfer a prisoner from one establishment to another is a matter for the NI Prison Service. In this case it was taken based upon the ongoing clinical assessment of Marian Price/ McGlinchey's needs.

I did not discuss this matter with either the NI Prison Service or the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has ensured that my Department is up to date on developments in this case.

### **Prisoners: Healthcare**

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his role in the provision of healthcare for prisoners.

**(AQW 9741/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** My Department has a duty to promote a system of healthcare designed to secure improvement in the physical and mental health and in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness, for all people in Northern Ireland, including those in prison.

In relation to prison healthcare services, this duty is discharged by the Health and Social Care Board and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, which, respectively, commission and provide healthcare services across the 3 prison establishments.

I am accountable to the Assembly for the manner in which this duty is discharged.

### **Altnagelvin Hospital: Loading Bay**

**Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the new £2 million loading bay at Altnagelvin Hospital is still not in use, given that patients, who are being taken to theatre and x-ray, have to pass the temporary loading bay which gives rise to health and safety issues.

**(AQW 9746/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The new loading bay was designed as part of a new Receipt and Distribution (R&D) facility for receipt of goods and onwards distribution. This R&D centre is located at some significant distance from the core hospital distribution lifts and requires additional resources to transfer goods over greater distances and to bring the centre fully into operation.

It is anticipated that the R&D centre, including the new loading bay, will be brought into use in the 2012/13 financial year.

### **Defibrillators: Foyle**

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many defibrillators are available to support clubs in the Foyle area.

**(AQW 9835/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Any organisation or individual may purchase a defibrillator. There is no requirement to register the purchase, possession or location of a defibrillator. It is therefore not known how many defibrillators are available to sports clubs in the Foyle area.

A pilot programme to train people to use defibrillators, which my Department is currently running, has had the additional benefit of raising awareness, in some sporting organisations and District Councils, of the location and accessibility of defibrillators purchased by their organisation and also the need for maintenance of the defibrillator and training of staff in their use.

### **Belfast City Hospital: Accident and Emergency Department**

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in light of the temporary closure of the Accident and Emergency Department at Belfast City Hospital, due to senior staffing problems, what steps his Department is taking to recruit staff to allow the Department to reopen.

**(AQW 9838/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The temporary closure of the emergency department at the City Hospital, from 1 November 2011, was for safety reasons and in order to sustain high quality services for the population of Belfast.

These changes are operational matters which will apply until there is a full public consultation and a longer term strategic decision taken by me on the permanent configuration of such services for the greater Belfast area.

I will only take that decision after I have listened carefully to stakeholders in a process of effective engagement and open and transparent consultation

## **Department of Justice**

### **Drugs: Accessories and Abettors Act 1861**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions have been secured for aiding, abetting counselling or procuring the commission of drugs offences under the Accessories and Abettors Act 1861, in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 9196/11-15)**

**Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice):** Section 8 of the Accessories and Abettors Act 1861 provides that anyone who aids, abets, counsels or procures shall be liable to be tried, indicted and punished as a principal offender. This might be recorded as a prosecution for the substantive offence or it might be recorded as aiding and abetting the substantive offence. It would not be the normal practice to quote the Accessories and Abettors Act 1861 in the charge or indictment.

It is not therefore possible to answer the question.

### Bangor Courthouse: Capital Spend

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the level of capital spend on Bangor Courthouse in each of the last five years; and what this represents as a percentage of the total capital spend on courthouses during this period.

**(AQW 9205/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The table below provides a breakdown of the capital spend on Bangor Courthouse in each of the last five years and the total capital spend on courthouses during the same period.

|                                    | 2007/08  | 2008/09    | 2009/10    | 2010/11    | 2011/12 <sup>1</sup> | Total      |
|------------------------------------|----------|------------|------------|------------|----------------------|------------|
| Bangor                             | -        | £11,825    | £83,799    | £42,510    | £10,271              | £148,405   |
| Total capital spend on courthouses | £375,724 | £1,927,878 | £2,387,184 | £3,827,089 | £613,258             | £9,131,133 |
| % of total capital spend on Bangor | 0%       | 0.6%       | 3.5%       | 1.1%       | 1.7%                 | 1.6%       |

1 – Figures are for the 10 month period April 2011 to January 2012 inclusive.

### Hospitality: Spend

**Mr Allister** asked Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 6361/11-15, whether the figures provided include the Department's arm's-length bodies; and if not, to provide this information for each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9215/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Spend on hospitality by the arm's-length bodies of the Department of Justice (DOJ) was not included in the answer to AQW 6361/11-15. Hospitality expenditure for the arm's-length bodies and Agencies of the DOJ for each of the last five years is set out in the table below.

|                     | 2006/07<br>£ | 2007/08<br>£ | 2008/09<br>£ | 2009/10<br>£ | 2010/11<br>£ |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Arm's-length Bodies | 17,068       | 18,660       | 25,688       | 33,665       | 13,344       |
| Agencies            | 90,117       | 67,981       | 85,008       | 87,384       | 47,717       |

This excludes hospitality expenditure for the Northern Ireland Police Fund and Independent Monitoring Boards prior to 2009/10. These figures could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

### Crime Prevention: Funding

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Justice what groups have benefited from the recently announced £800,000 of funding to address the fear of crime in local communities; and why his Department only invited applications from within the Department and its arm's-length bodies.

**(AQW 9226/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** I have provided a list of those organisations which benefited from the funding as an annex to this answer.

Under section 94 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the Department of Justice has the power to allocate funds to prevent crime and reduce the fear of crime and to support the recovery of criminal assets. Applications were invited from within the Department and from its agencies and arm's-length bodies as the funding became available relatively late in the year. Existing funding streams were used to ensure that governance and accountability structures were in place. I have asked officials to consider seeking applications from a wider field in 2012/13.

### Children and Vulnerable Adults: Independent Safeguarding Authority

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Justice to detail, for each year since 2010 (i) the total number of barred individuals, as defined by the Independent Safeguard Authority and Access NI, who (a) have sought to undertake; or (b) have undertaken work with vulnerable groups; (ii) the number of employers who knowingly have employed barred individuals; (iii) the length of time each breach existed before being detected; and (iv) whether any penalties were imposed on the barred (a) employee; and (b) employer.

**(AQW 9248/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Since 2010 AccessNI has matched 11 applicants, who have been seeking work with children or vulnerable adults (regulated activity), with individuals on the lists of barred persons held by the Independent Safeguarding Authority as follow:

| Year           | Number of individuals matched |
|----------------|-------------------------------|
| 2010           | 6                             |
| 2011           | 2                             |
| 2012 (to date) | 3                             |

In relation to part (iv)(a) of the Question:

It is an offence under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007 for anyone on these lists to seek employment in regulated activity. AccessNI passes details of all such suspected offences to PSNI. In relation to the eleven cases set out in the table above:

- Two cases were not referred to PSNI. In one the individual was seeking work in controlled activity rather than regulated activity. Those working in controlled activity can do so while barred. In the other case no application should have been made to AccessNI.
- Three cases had insufficient information to be referred by police for consideration of a prosecution as, for example, the applicant did not make the application him or herself, or he or she was applying for a position that he or she believed did not require work with children or vulnerable persons.
- One case was passed by police to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) which recommended no prosecution.
- One individual received a police caution, directed by PPS.
- Two cases are pending with PPS.
- Two cases are currently under police investigation.

With regard to questions (i)(a) and (b), (ii), (iii) and (iv)(b), AccessNI operates in accordance with Part V of the Police Act 1997 to provide criminal history information to organisations. It has no information on these aspects.

### **Thomas Ward: Sexual Offences Prevention Order**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice what monitoring was in place following the release of Thomas Ward; and on how many occasions he breached his Sexual Offenders Prevention Order.

**(AQW 9257/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** I cannot provide detail on any individual case.

Information in relation to multi agency public protection arrangements, including detail of risk assessment, risk management initiatives and court orders used in the risk management process are available on the PPANI website.

Breach of a SOPO is a criminal offence and a matter for the courts.

### **Jury Service: Financial Compensation**

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Justice whether people who are called for Jury Service will receive financial compensation for the working days they have lost while they are required to be available for service, even if they are not selected to sit on the jury.

**(AQW 9269/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** People who are called for jury service may claim for loss of earnings whether or not they are sworn on a jury.

A Juror Information Booklet is sent to people summonsed for jury service and explains details of allowances and the claims process.

### **Policing and Community Safety Partnerships: Successful Applicants**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8593/11-15, how many of the applicants in each constituency were successful at interview and were referred to the Policing Board as cleared for appointment.

**(AQW 9280/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The process of appointing independent members to Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) is a restricted function of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

I have been informed by the Policing Board that the information you have requested is not yet available, however it can be provided to you once finalised.

### **Compensation Recovery Unit: Legal Aid**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Justice how many compensation claims registered with the Compensation Recovery Unit have involved plaintiffs in receipt of legal aid in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 9326/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Legal aid is administered through the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (the Commission). The Compensation Recovery Unit (CRU) provides compensators and customers with details of Social Security benefits paid in respect

of accidents, injury or disease for which compensation is awarded. The personal data held by CRU is subject to Data Protection legislation and the Commission does not have access to these records. The Department therefore cannot provide details on who received legal aid in these cases.

### **Thomas Ward: Reoffending**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether he will an order an investigation into the release of Thomas Ward, to include (i) how he presented himself as reformed to Probation Officers; (ii) whether any prison staff expressed concerns about his release; (iii) the monitoring that was in place following his release; (iv) how he was able to repeatedly breach his Sexual Offences Prevention Order requirements; (v) why he was allowed to reside close to his victim following his release; and (vi) how he was able to commit a second sexual assault whilst under restrictions.

**(AQW 9331/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** It is always regrettable when an offender chooses to reoffend despite best efforts on the part of agencies to reduce risk.

The Departmental guidance to agencies on public protection arrangements (PPANI), issued under Article 50 of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008, requires the agencies to consider commissioning a serious case review where an individual whose risk of serious harm is being managed through the arrangements, is charged with a serious sexual or violent offence, or where a significant failure occurs in their risk management. The definition of a serious sexual offence is provided in the PPANI Manual of Practice. Both documents are available on the PPANI website.

I understand that the agencies have examined the matter and do not believe that there are sufficient issues in the PPANI process which need to be addressed through the serious case review procedure in the context of this case.

### **Prison Service: Unannounced Inspections**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8563/11-15, to outline the position in relation to unannounced inspections from external inspectors and agencies, which the 2009 Pearson Review Team Report raised as a matter of concern.

**(AQW 9337/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) is the primary agency for the inspection of organisations within the criminal justice system, including prisons. CJINI undertakes both announced and unannounced inspections which, depending on the nature and scope of the inspection can involve other agencies.

### **Thomas Ward: Fit for Release**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether, prior to his release, Thomas Ward was deemed rehabilitated or reformed by the relevant authorities after serving a sentence for sexual assault in 2006; and on what date he was classed as fit for release.

**(AQW 9418/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The information requested constitutes sensitive personal data as defined at section 2 of the Data Protection Act 1998. The disclosure of such information is likely to breach the data subject's rights under the Act and would be incompatible with the Data Protection Principles. The information cannot therefore be provided as requested.

For those sentenced to a determinate sentence prior to the introduction of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 there was no discretion to release any individual other than on the earliest date of release as calculated in accordance with NIPS Sentence Calculation policy.

### **Marian Price: Move to Hydebank Wood**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8561/11-15, who authorised the expenditure; and why the alterations were deemed necessary.

**(AQW 9458/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The alterations were authorised by Senior Management at Prison Service Headquarters. They were deemed necessary following a security and regime review.

### **Prisons: Deliberate Damage Caused by Inmates**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how much has been spent in each of the last five years in each prison facility, including Hydebank Young Offenders Centre and in juvenile justice units, on repair or replacements following deliberate damage caused by inmates.

**(AQW 9460/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** It is not possible to detail the cost of repair or replacements following deliberate damage caused by inmates except at disproportionate cost to the public purse.

**Bench Warrants: Court Divisions**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8086/11-15, in which court division each of these warrants was issued. **(AQW 9462/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The table below details the breakdown sought.

| <b>Warrant Issued</b> | <b>Number Outstanding</b> | <b>County Court Division</b>               |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|--|
| 1 to 5 years          | 2                         | Belfast                                    |
| 5 to 10 years         | 3                         | Antrim<br>Armagh & South Down<br>Craigavon |

**Parole Process: Timescales**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice what is the minimum length of time before a prisoner can re-apply for parole after a refusal. **(AQW 9472/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The release arrangements for prisoners serving indeterminate or extended custodial sentences are set out in article 18(5)(b) of The Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. The minimum period is two years before a prisoner can re-apply for parole. However, on refusing an application, the Parole Commissioners indicate when the case should be referred to them again and the Northern Ireland Prison Service makes a referral in line with this timescale. Cases must be reconsidered within a maximum period of two years from refusal.

### Courthouse Closures: Impact on Travel Arrangements

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AOW 8726/11-15, to detail the travel arrangements of court users broken down by (i) defendants; (ii) legal representatives; (iii) press; (iv) witnesses; (v) police; and (vi) other court users.  
(AOW 9533/11-15)

Mr Ford: The travel arrangements of court users attending Magherafelt and Strabane Courthouses as collected on the day of the 2011 Exit Survey are set out in the following tables:-

#### Magherafelt

|                                     | Walk     |             | Own Vehicle |              | Lift from friend/family |             | Bus      |             | Brought by PSNI/<br>Solicitor |             | Other    |             | Don't know/<br>refusal/missing |             |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|----------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|----------|-------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
|                                     | Count    | %           | Count       | %            | Count                   | %           | Count    | %           | Count                         | %           | Count    | %           | Count                          | %           |
| Applicant/<br>Claimant/ Plaintiff   | 0        | 0%          | 4           | 66.7%        | 1                       | 16.7%       | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 1        | 16.7%       | 0                              | 0%          |
| Defendant/<br>Respondent            | 1        | 5%          | 14          | 70%          | 3                       | 15.0%       | 1        | 5%          | 1                             | 5.0%        | 0        | 0%          | 0                              | 0%          |
| PSNI                                | 0        | 0%          | 5           | 71.4%        | 0                       | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 1                             | 14.3%       | 1        | 14.3%       | 0                              | 0%          |
| PPS                                 | 0        | 0%          | 1           | 100%         | 0                       | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                              | 0%          |
| Legal Profession/<br>Representative | 0        | 0%          | 19          | 95%          | 0                       | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 1                              | 5%          |
| Prosecution Agency                  | 0        | 0%          | 5           | 100%         | 0                       | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                              | 0%          |
| Witness                             | 0        | 0%          | 1           | 33.3%        | 2                       | 66.7%       | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                              | 0%          |
| Court Agent                         | 0        | 0%          | 2           | 100%         | 0                       | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                              | 0%          |
| Family/Friend                       | 4        | 28.6%       | 10          | 71%          | 0                       | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                              | 0%          |
| Media                               | 0        | 0%          | 2           | 100%         | 0                       | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                              | 0%          |
| Other                               | 1        | 14.3%       | 3           | 42.9%        | 1                       | 14.3%       | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 2        | 28.6%       | 0                              | 0%          |
| Member of Public                    | 0        | 0%          | 1           | 100%         | 0                       | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                              | 0%          |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>6</b> | <b>6.8%</b> | <b>67</b>   | <b>76.1%</b> | <b>7</b>                | <b>8.0%</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>1.1%</b> | <b>2</b>                      | <b>2.3%</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>4.5%</b> | <b>1</b>                       | <b>1.1%</b> |

## Strabane

|                                     | Walk     |              | Own Vehicle |              | Lift from friend/family |              | Taxi     |             | Bus      |             | Brought by PSNI/<br>Solicitor |             | Don't know/<br>refusal/missing |             |
|-------------------------------------|----------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
|                                     | Count    | %            | Count       | %            | Count                   | Row %        | Count    | %           | Count    | %           | Count                         | %           | Count                          | %           |
| Applicant/Claimant/<br>Plaintiff    | 2        | 15.4%        | 6           | 46.2%        | 5                       | 38.5%        | 0        | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 0                              | 0%          |
| Defendant/<br>Respondent            | 2        | 12.5%        | 8           | 50%          | 2                       | 12.5%        | 2        | 12.5%       | 1        | 6.3%        | 0                             | 0%          | 1                              | 6.3%        |
| PSNI                                | 1        | 25%          | 2           | 50%          | 0                       | 0%           | 0        | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 1                             | 25%         | 0                              | 0%          |
| Legal Profession/<br>Representative | 1        | 20.0%        | 4           | 80%          | 0                       | 0%           | 0        | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 0                              | 0%          |
| Witness                             | 1        | 20%          | 4           | 80%          | 0                       | 0%           | 0        | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 0                              | 0%          |
| Victim                              | 0        | 0%           | 3           | 100%         | 0                       | 0%           | 0        | 0%          | 0        | 0%          | 0                             | 0%          | 0                              | 0%          |
| Family/Friend                       | 1        | 3.6%         | 13          | 46.4%        | 9                       | 32.1%        | 3        | 10.7%       | 1        | 3.6%        | 0                             | 0%          | 1                              | 3.6%        |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>8</b> | <b>10.8%</b> | <b>40</b>   | <b>54.1%</b> | <b>16</b>               | <b>21.6%</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6.8%</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>2.7%</b> | <b>1</b>                      | <b>1.4%</b> | <b>2</b>                       | <b>2.7%</b> |

Note: Count refers to the number of people surveyed.



## Occupy Belfast Movement: Investigations/Charges

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Justice how many members of the Occupy Belfast movement have been (i) charged with offences; and (ii) convicted of an offence.

**(AQW 9714/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The PSNI have no completed or ongoing investigations in relation to the Occupy Belfast Movement.

## Drugs: Ocean Snow

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to introduce legislation to outlaw the sale, supply and possession of the 'legal high' Ocean Snow, given that it was found to contain the Class A drug p-methoxymethylamphetamine.

**(AQW 9762/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** It is the substance or substances in a product that are illegal, not the product name itself. If the product is found to contain p-methoxymethylamphetamine (PMMA), which is a class A drug, it is already illegal and therefore no further legislation is required.

## Department for Regional Development

### Cars: For Sale on a Public Road

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to address the issue of cars marked for sale being parked in public spaces.

**(AQW 2812/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):** As Minister with responsibility for roads, your question has been passed to me to reply. My Department's Roads Service has advised that offering of cars for sale on a public road is unlawful and constitutes an offence under Article 90 of The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993. Offenders shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine.

While legal powers do exist, Roads Service's policy and procedures in relation to its response to the selling of vehicles along the road side are aimed at ensuring the safety of the public. Therefore, particular attention is given to matters concerning the obstructions of sightlines, footways etc. The objective of enforcement is not so much to secure convictions and impose penalties, as to remove the offending vehicle and or discourage other potential offenders.

Roads Service generally contacts car sellers on an informal basis and advises of the restrictions on offering vehicles for sale, as covered by the Roads Order. Such approaches are generally successful and it has not been necessary to divert any resources in pursuit of prosecution cases.

With regard to cars marked for sale being parked in public spaces my colleague, Nelson McCausland MLA, Minister for Social Development has advised that under the Street Trading Act (Northern Ireland) 2001, a person selling cars in a public place as a business is required to have a street trading licence issued by the district council in which the trading is taking place.

It is an offence for a person to engage in street trading without a licence issued by the council in which the trading is taking place, or to contravene the conditions of a licence in relation to the trading location or the days and times during which trading can take place. An authorised officer of a council or a police constable may seize goods and any receptacle or equipment being used in the course of the trading, and on summary conviction of any of the above offences, a court may impose a fine of up to £1000.

### Cycle Lane: Beersbridge Road

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) why cars are permitted to park on the Beersbridge Road bicycle lane at all times except rush hour; (ii) for his assessment of the safety of cyclists using this bicycle lane when cars are parked along the route; (iii) why this bicycle lane begins and ends intermittently along the route; (iv) for his assessment of the value of this bicycle lane when cars are parked along the route; and (v) to outline any plans his Department has to prohibit cars from parking along this bicycle lane and to provide adequate car parking spaces elsewhere.

**(AQW 9175/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Beersbridge Road is subject to Clearway regulations, which prohibit parking during the morning and afternoon peak periods of traffic flow. Advisory cycle lanes are usually installed on roads with Clearway regulations, so that when traffic levels and the number of cyclists are at their highest, cyclists effectively have their own road space. This makes cycling safer, and at times of congestion, allows cyclists to make time savings over those using vehicular modes.

During times when traffic levels are at their lowest and the Clearway restrictions do not apply, it is legally permissible to park across cycle lanes. During these off-peak times, the levels of traffic and cyclists are at their lowest and it is therefore considered that cyclists can successfully share the remaining roads space. This arrangement is intended to provide the best balance between the needs of cyclists and the adjoining businesses/properties.

Whilst it would, in my view, be desirable to install a continuous cycle lane along Beersbridge Road, a balance has to be struck and the needs of all other road users, with the result that such an arrangement can be difficult to achieve. For example, the provision of a continuous cycle lane would have reduced the capacity of junctions and narrowed stretches of the Beersbridge Road, resulting in queues and delays, maybe up to twice those presently experienced.

The provision of a mandatory cycle lane, which would be marked by a solid white line, would provide a clear route for cyclists and would also restrict vehicles, subject to certain exceptions, from parking along the road. However, the introduction of waiting restrictions, or mandatory cycle lanes, can be a contentious issue and would generally lead to a displacement of parking, often to other locations that are less able to accommodate it, such as residential streets in the general vicinity. Therefore, Roads Service currently has no plans to further prohibit parking at the Beersbridge Road cycle lane, or to provide additional car parking spaces in this vicinity.

I can, however, advise that it remains Roads Service's intention to continue to implement, in so far as resources permit, the cycling infrastructure as set out in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) and the Regional Transportation Strategy, which will complement the existing National Cycle Network.

### **Cycling: 'Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland'**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the consultation document 'Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland'; and whether we should have an independent target to increase cycling by 5 percent by 2020. **(AQW 9213/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** The draft Active Travel Strategy 'Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland' aims to build upon the many programmes and initiatives that have already been successful – both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. I want the Strategy, when agreed, to provide the foundations, over the longer term, to build a travel culture in which walking and cycling are seen as the natural choice for most of the journeys most of us make.

The public consultation on the draft Strategy ended on 9th March 2012. Informed by the views expressed by respondents, we are currently considering whether a specific target is required in respect of cycling. My Department will also draw up a detailed action plan to coordinate and monitor delivery and the impact of the actions through the current budget period, 2012 – 2015.

### **Hospitality: Spend**

**Mr Allister** asked Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 8070/11-15, whether the figures provided include the Department's arm's-length bodies; and if not, to provide this information for each of the last five years. **(AQW 9246/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** The response to AQW 8070/11-15 did not include the Department's arm's-length bodies. Expenditure on hospitality by the Department's arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five financial years, is provided below.

| <b>Year</b> | <b>NITHC<br/>£'000</b> | <b>NI Water<br/>£'000</b> | <b>Total Cost<br/>£'000</b> |
|-------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2006 / 07   | 27*                    | 62**                      | 89                          |
| 2007 / 08   | 27*                    | 63                        | 90                          |
| 2008 / 09   | 26*                    | 67                        | 93                          |
| 2009 / 10   | 27                     | 53                        | 80                          |
| 2010 / 11   | 24                     | 18                        | 42                          |

\* The NI Transport Holding Company (NITHC) is the parent company of Northern Ireland Railways, Metro and Ulsterbus all operating as Translink. Expenditure by the holding company is excluded as it transferred to a new accounting system in 2009/10, prior to which hospitality expenditure was not separately identifiable.

\*\* NI Water costs for 2006/07 relate to its predecessor Water Service. .

For completeness Translink has advised that there may also be occasions when executives and senior management provide working lunches at meetings which are paid for and claimed back through expenses. These come out of payroll and to extract such detail would involve disproportionate cost.

### **Newry River: Bridge Project**

**Ms Ruane** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on his recent meetings with the Warrenpoint, Dundalk and Kilkeel Chambers of Commerce in relation to the Narrow Water Bridge Project. **(AQW 9255/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I can confirm that I met with representatives of the Warrenpoint, Dundalk and Kilkeel Chambers of Commerce on Monday 27 February 2012, with no officials present, when the Narrow Water Bridge project was discussed. Those attending the

meeting confirmed their support for the bridge linking the Mourne and the Cooley Peninsula, describing its primary benefit as addressing the under-performance of the tourist industry in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

I advised that, whilst I understood the benefits that the bridge might be expected to provide, I had responsibility for roads infrastructure and tourism did not fall within my remit. I also highlighted the substantial benefits the proposed Newry Southern Relief Road project would bring, if that scheme was progressed.

I confirmed that, I was not in a position to contribute any funds to the Narrow Water Bridge scheme. While I undertook to reflect on the detailed business case when it is provided, I also advised the delegation to ensure they made representations to other significant players in the Northern Ireland Executive.

### **Newry River: Bridge Project**

**Ms Ruane** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on his recent meetings with Newry and Mourne District Council and Louth County Council in relation to the Narrow Water Bridge Project.

**(AQW 9256/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I can advise the Member that I met with a delegation from Newry and Mourne District Council and Louth County Council on Wednesday 22 February 2012 to discuss Narrow Water Bridge. I was advised that Planning Applications for the scheme, including a comprehensive Environmental Statement (Environmental Impact Statement), had been submitted in both jurisdictions.

The delegation advised the primary benefit of the bridge as enhancing the tourist potential of the area, particularly Cooley Peninsula and the Mourne. They also advised how it was envisaged the project's estimated cost of €17.369 million would be funded and confirmed that an application for EU Interreg funding had recently been submitted, with Louth County Council as the lead partner and having responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the bridge and associated costs.

I advised that, whilst I understood the benefits that the bridge might provide, I had responsibility for roads infrastructure and tourism did not fall within my remit. I also highlighted the substantial benefits the proposed Newry Southern Relief Road project would bring, if that scheme was progressed.

The delegation understood that as the proposed bridge did not improve or extend Northern Ireland's Strategic Road Network, it would therefore not attract a high priority compared to other schemes in my Department's current programme for road improvements.

I confirmed that I was not in a position to contribute any funds to the scheme. I undertook to reflect on the detailed business case when it became available and advised the delegation to ensure they made representations to other significant players in the Northern Ireland Executive.

### **A55: Knock Road Upgrade**

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the outcome of the public inquiry into the proposed A55 Knock Road upgrade.

**(AQW 9321/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has been considering the Inspector's report since March 2011. The report recommended that further detailed consideration be given to some engineering issues, however, this involved traffic surveys which could only be carried out during autumn 2011. Analysis of the information is now nearing completion.

My Department intends to release its response to the Inspector's recommendations by way of a Departmental Statement and the Inspector's report will be made available to the public at the same time.

It is intended to publish the Departmental Statement and the Inspector's report in spring 2012.

### **Cycling Strategy: Update**

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Northern Ireland Cycling Strategy.

**(AQW 9329/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** In the 2007 Northern Ireland Cycling Strategy it was suggested that an opportunity existed locally to integrate both cycling and walking in one Sustainable Transport Forum.

My Department, in keeping with its objective of supporting and promoting both cycling and walking, established an inter-sectoral Active Travel Forum which has tasked with providing recommendations for a draft Active Travel Strategy. A public consultation on the draft Strategy entitled 'Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland' concluded on 9th March 2012. The Strategy aims to build upon earlier initiatives such as the Northern Ireland Cycling Strategy and develop a new travel culture in which walking and cycling are seen as the natural choice for most of the journeys most of us make.

### Away-days and Team-building Exercises: Cost-effectiveness

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department assesses the cost-effectiveness of awaydays and team-building exercises.

**(AQW 9343/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** In my Department, away-days and team building events are generally arranged to support effective business planning and team working and in some cases involve working with a charity as part of a wider volunteering initiative.

Evaluations of interventions of this nature show that team events facilitate focussed and productive working and help enhance team effectiveness through improved communication, leadership and staff morale.

### Parking: Enforcement

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Regional Development when the current contract with NSL is due to expire; and whether a decision has been made to continue with a similar scheme after this date.

**(AQW 9353/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the current parking enforcement and car-park management services contract with NSL Services Group will expire in October 2012.

In order to ensure that services continue to be provided after that date, Roads Service is currently engaged with the Department of Finance and Personnel's Central Procurement Directorate, in a competitive tendering procurement project.

### Ballymena Bus Station: Booking Office

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Regional Development how much it cost Translink to alter the Booking Office counter at the Ballymena bus station; and what use will be made of it in the future.

**(AQW 9448/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** Translink advise that works to revise ticket counter facilities at Ballymena bus station cost £6,118.

The alterations to the booking office counter at Ballymena Bus Station were part of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Project work which was carried out at all Translink operational locations. These works replaced an old counter which did not comply with DDA guidance. The new counter will allow less able bodied people to access all Translink services provided at 'Tickets and Information' in future.

### Buses: North Down

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department plans to invest in new buses for the North Down area over the next three years.

**(AQW 9477/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** Translink has advised that it has no specific plans to invest in new buses for the North Down area over the next three years.

The possibility of providing funding for Translink's overall Bus Replacement Programme will be kept under review. Additional funding may become available during the period of the budget.

## Department for Social Development

### Capital Building Programme

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his Department's planned major capital building programmes in each of the next three years.

**(AQW 8052/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):** The table below provides details of my Department's planned major capital building programmes in each of the next three years.

|                         | 2012 - 13<br>£k | 2013 - 14<br>£k | 2014 - 15<br>£k |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Neighbourhood Renewal   | 6,000           | 8,000           | 8,000           |
| Urban Development Grant | 3,312           | 3,000           | 3,000           |
| Public Realm            | 12,360          | 15,000          | 15,000          |
| Modernisation Fund      | 2,000           | 0               | 0               |

|              | <b>2012 - 13</b><br>£k | <b>2013 - 14</b><br>£k | <b>2014 - 15</b><br>£k |
|--------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Total</b> | <b>23,672</b>          | <b>26,000</b>          | <b>26,000</b>          |

### Double Glazing: Benefits

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the benefits of double glazing a house which does not have cavity wall insulation.

**(AQW 9064/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The installation of cavity wall insulation provides an excellent investment for any home. It is the Housing Executive's policy to insulate empty cavity walls, most of which were carried out before 1990, although a small number may not have been insulated where a tenant refused permission or where the construction is of single skin. The benefits from double glazing a house are better if the house has already had cavity wall insulation installed or where single skin walls have external wall insulation. Energy efficient double glazing keeps a home warmer and quieter as well as reducing energy bills, lowering carbon emissions and improving comfort levels by reducing drafts and condensation. Actual costs and savings will differ depending upon dwelling type, size of window and materials used. The most commonly used material is uPVC which is long lasting and can be recycled. I have therefore ensured that the Programme for Government has as a priority to improve the thermal efficiency of Housing Executive stock and ensure full double glazing in its properties.

### Jobs and Benefits Offices: Staffing

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Development whether all staff who offer face-to-face advice in Jobs and Benefits Offices will retain their posts, given the problems that might be encountered by claimants as a result of the proposed Welfare Reform changes and the likely increase in the demand for advice.

**(AQW 9173/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The Social Security Agency is currently working with relevant impacted government organisations to consider how best to deliver a range of services through Jobs and Benefits offices as a result of the changes brought about by the reform of the welfare system.

Central to the planning for each of these changes is the need to ensure that customers continue to have access to the necessary advice and support channels they will need as these changes are introduced. This includes ensuring the right number of staff, with the right skills, in the right places to help meet the needs of our customers.

Work is also underway to consider the organisational and staffing considerations for each of these reform initiatives. Whilst it is too soon to determine the staffing requirement in detail, I can confirm that I remain committed to face to face services as one part of the benefit service which will be available following implementation of the changes proposed under Welfare Reform.

### Alcohol Promotions

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister for Social Development what plans he has in relation to his commitment to tackle the limiting of alcohol promotions.

**(AQW 9271/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** As Minister responsible for Liquor Licensing I have been concerned for some time about how alcohol is promoted and marketed and in particular promotions involving very cheap alcohol. The Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 gave my Department the powers to ban irresponsible drink promotions. Therefore, I have decided to make regulations to ban irresponsible alcohol promotions such as, "All you can drink for £20" and supermarkets offering 8 bottles of beer/cider for the price of 6. A public consultation was launched on 12 March on the detail of these regulations.

My Department is currently working with various drinks trade representatives on developing a code of practice which seeks to promote best practice and to prevent alcohol being irresponsibly promoted, served or sold. The code will seek to end irresponsible promotions which encourage excessive consumption of alcohol, such as serving alcohol in large measures, promotions encouraging specific groups to drink for free or at a discount, "Half price drinks for under 25s", discount night for students, "Buy one get one free".

I intend to make compliance with the code a condition of holding a liquor licence.

### Gnangara, Enniskillen: Housing Executive Referrals

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of referrals to Gnangara, Enniskillen, since its opening, which were made by (i) self or family; (ii) care management; (iii) Community Social Work Teams; (iv) other elements of the Health Service; and (v) the Housing Executive.

**(AQW 9293/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The information is not available in the format requested. However, Fold Group has advised me that referrals to Gnangara, Enniskillen were as follows;

- one person self referred for supported accommodation;
- 17 referrals were made by Care Management /Community Social Work Teams
- three referrals for the supported accommodation bungalows have been received through Western Health and Social Care Trust Community Teams / Care Management and,
- there have been no direct referrals from the Housing Executive

### **Fuel Poverty: St Vincent de Paul Society**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to outline the role that Saint Vincent de Paul plays in tackling fuel poverty; (ii) for his assessment of its contribution to tackling fuel poverty; and (iii) how his Department intends to work with charitable organisations, such as Saint Vincent de Paul, to ensure that resources are best targeted to meet objective need.

**(AQW 9295/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The Department for Social Development's new Fuel Poverty Strategy "Warmer Healthier Homes" gave a commitment to build partnerships to tackle fuel poverty and to work with partners to promote Oil Stamp Savings Schemes. Saint Vincent de Paul played a key role in the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group working in partnership with other government departments and colleagues from the voluntary sector. The Society also played a leading role in the development of Oil Stamp Saving Schemes. In relation to the question relating to working with charitable organisations the Department for Social Development has supported and will continue to support many charitable organisations in the Voluntary and Community sector through a range of funding programmes.

### **Energy Assessors: Funding**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration his Department has given to funding energy assessors to examine domestic or commercial properties, to identify energy inefficiencies and save consumers money.

**(AQW 9315/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** Improving domestic energy efficiency is a key part of my Department's new Fuel Poverty strategy "Warmer Healthier Homes" which was launched in April 2011. The strategy is to take forward a pilot area based approach to tackling fuel poverty and this pilot scheme is due to commence later this year. I expect the pilot scheme to include an assessment of the energy efficiency of each home in the target areas and this will be carried out by a trained energy assessor.

On the commercial side, Invest NI can provide project management support which can include for example the assessment of energy, water and materials use with a view to identifying and prioritising projects that will reduce the cost of consumption. Invest NI also provides funding for an interest free Energy Efficiency Loan Fund managed and operated by the Carbon Trust. This fund provides unsecured business loans from £3,000 to £400,000 to help Northern Ireland businesses purchase energy saving equipment. The anticipated energy savings accrued in any particular project funded through the loan fund provide the means to repay the loan. Since the launch of the fund in 2003 over £18 million in interest free loans have been offered to over 330 Northern Ireland businesses, and leveraged an additional £20 million of private sector investment.

### **Crisis Loans: Criteria**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the criteria used when considering an application for a crisis loan.

**(AQW 9322/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** If a person needs financial help with an emergency or disaster they may be able to get a crisis loan. The loans are decided on an individual basis and will have to be paid back, but are not subject to interest charges. The criteria used when considering an application for a crisis loan are – the person must: be aged 16 or over; not have enough money to meet their (or their family's) immediate short term needs in an emergency or as the result of a disaster; and without the loan there will be a serious damage or risk to their (or their family's) health or safety.

### **Social Housing: Bungalows**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of social housing bungalows with (i) 1; and (ii) 2 bedrooms, broken down by council area.

**(AQW 9323/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate these details by district council area. However, table 1 below details the number of Housing Executive bungalows with one or two bedrooms, by District Office area: -

**Table 1: Housing Executive Bungalows (with one and two bedrooms):**

| <b>Housing Executive District Office</b> | <b>1 Bedroom Bungalows</b> | <b>2 Bedroom Bungalows</b> |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Antrim                                   | 125                        | 197                        |
| Armagh                                   | 161                        | 496                        |
| Ballycastle                              | 109                        | 141                        |
| Ballymena                                | 162                        | 308                        |
| Ballymoney                               | 65                         | 249                        |
| Banbridge                                | 183                        | 371                        |
| Bangor                                   | 209                        | 437                        |
| Carrickfergus                            | 146                        | 274                        |
| Castlereagh                              | 196                        | 414                        |
| Coleraine                                | 162                        | 326                        |
| Collon Terrace                           | 94                         | 296                        |
| Cookstown                                | 25                         | 160                        |
| Downpatrick                              | 141                        | 613                        |
| Dungannon                                | 141                        | 266                        |
| East Belfast                             | 78                         | 170                        |
| Fermanagh                                | 97                         | 697                        |
| Larne                                    | 102                        | 93                         |
| Limavady                                 | 114                        | 291                        |
| Lisburn Antrim St                        | 282                        | 610                        |
| Lisburn Dairyfarm                        | 79                         | 187                        |
| Lurgan Brownlow                          | 148                        | 420                        |
| Magherafelt                              | 15                         | 384                        |
| Newry                                    | 313                        | 597                        |
| Newtownabbey 1                           | 89                         | 149                        |
| Newtownabbey 2                           | 229                        | 144                        |
| Newtownards                              | 224                        | 778                        |
| North Belfast                            | 84                         | 388                        |
| Omagh                                    | 103                        | 329                        |
| Portadown                                | 240                        | 159                        |
| Shankill                                 | 49                         | 285                        |
| South Belfast                            | 85                         | 208                        |
| Strabane                                 | 74                         | 524                        |
| Waterloo Place                           | 108                        | 104                        |
| Waterside                                | 77                         | 463                        |
| West Belfast                             | 153                        | 185                        |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>4,662</b>               | <b>11,713</b>              |

Table 2 below details the number of Housing Associations bungalows with one and two bedrooms, broken down by council area: -

**Table 2: Housing Association Bungalows (with one and two bedrooms): -**

| <b>Council Area</b>                        | <b>1 Bed Bungalows</b> | <b>2 Bed Bungalows</b> |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| Antrim Borough Council                     | 10                     | 29                     |
| Ards Borough Council                       | 44                     | 72                     |
| Armagh City and District Council           | 0                      | 36                     |
| Ballymena Borough Council                  | 31                     | 52                     |
| Ballymoney Borough Council                 | 9                      | 24                     |
| Banbridge District Council                 | 7                      | 12                     |
| Belfast City Council                       | 344                    | 765                    |
| Carrickfergus Borough Council              | 47                     | 78                     |
| Castlereagh Borough Council                | 3                      | 61                     |
| Coleraine Borough Council                  | 22                     | 53                     |
| Cookstown District Council                 | 1                      | 3                      |
| Craigavon Borough Council                  | 61                     | 76                     |
| Derry City Council                         | 146                    | 263                    |
| Down District Council                      | 0                      | 33                     |
| Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council | 0                      | 20                     |
| Fermanagh District Council                 | 38                     | 98                     |
| Larne Borough Council                      | 50                     | 3                      |
| Limavady Borough Council                   | 0                      | 41                     |
| Lisburn City Council                       | 52                     | 219                    |
| Magherafelt District Council               | 33                     | 15                     |
| Moyle District Council                     | 15                     | 27                     |
| Newry & Mourne District Council            | 17                     | 71                     |
| Newtownabbey Borough Council               | 44                     | 42                     |
| North Down Borough Council                 | 82                     | 76                     |
| Omagh District Council                     | 8                      | 37                     |
| Strabane District Council                  | 43                     | 85                     |
| <b>Total</b>                               | <b>1107</b>            | <b>2291</b>            |

The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

### **Compensation Recovery Unit: Legal Aid**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Social Development how much public money has been recouped by the Compensation Recovery Unit from cases where the plaintiff was in receipt of legal aid, in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 9327/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The Compensation Recovery Unit are not informed if legal aid has been applied for therefore this information is not held on any Department for Social Development Systems and cannot be obtained.



## Rural Poverty

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 7987 11-15, why figures are not available for the total number of individuals in the Rural East area who are living in relative low income.

**(AQW 9345/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The total number of individuals in the Rural East who are living in relative low income is not available for 2008/09 due to small sample sizes. The relative low income figures are produced from the Family Resources Survey, which has a sample size of around 1900 households. This sample size is sufficient to allow overall Northern Ireland analysis, but when broken down into smaller geographical areas, some areas may not have sufficient samples to allow us to produce meaningful results for total numbers in low income.

During the year 2008/09 the number and percentage of individuals living below the relative poverty line for rural areas is presented in Table 1. The results are produced using the Family Resources Survey datasets for Northern Ireland, and the Urban Rural Report for Northern Ireland.

**Table 1:**

| 2008/09<br><br>Area | Before Housing Costs (BHC)                   |  | After Housing Costs (AHC)                    |  |
|---------------------|--|--|--|--|
|                     | Number of Individuals in relative low income | Percentage of Individuals in relative low income | Number of Individuals in relative low income | Percentage of Individuals in relative low income |
| Rural East          | ..   | 19   | ..   | 21   |
| Rural West          | 130,400                                      | 27   | 123,800                                      | 26   |
| All Rural           | 190,500                                      | 24   | 189,000                                      | 24   |
| Northern Ireland    | 372,400                                      | 21   | 366,500                                      | 21   |

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## Housing Executive: Kitchen Replacement Schemes

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQO 1327/11-15, to detail the level of investment in each of the kitchen replacement schemes planned for the (i) Craigavon; and (ii) Banbridge areas.

**(AQW 9346/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The tables below provide details of the level of investment in kitchen replacement schemes planned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for the Craigavon and Banbridge areas.

**Table 1 shows planned investment in kitchen replacement schemes in Craigavon**

| Craigavon                   | Estimated Cost |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| <b>2011/12</b>              |                |
| Ballyoran Estate, Portadown | £456,000       |
| <b>2012/13</b>              |                |
| Hospital Estate, Lurgan     | £413,000       |
| Drumbeg Estate, Brownlow    | £456,000       |
| Redmanville, Portadown      | £329,000       |

**Table 2 shows planned investment in kitchen replacement schemes in Banbridge**

| Banbridge                  | Estimated Cost |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| <b>2011/12</b>             |                |
| Primrose Estate, Banbridge | £309,000       |
| <b>2012/13</b>             |                |
| Reilly Street, Banbridge   | £434,000       |

All schemes are dependent on available finance.

## Regional Infrastructure Programme: Publicity

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department has taken to advertise the Regional Infrastructure Programme.

**(AQW 9367/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** Following a review of the Regional Infrastructure Programme, new arrangements to support the voluntary and community sector (VCS) at a regional level across Northern Ireland are due to go live in October 2012.

To publicise this change I can confirm that adverts were placed in the Belfast Telegraph, Irish News and News Letter on 8 February 2012 seeking expressions of interest for a strategic partner from the VCS to deliver the new Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP) aimed at providing generic support to the sector.

Adverts in respect of regional thematic support for faith sector engagement, voluntary generalist advice and women in disadvantaged areas were placed in Belfast Telegraph, Irish News and News Letter on 15 February.

A further advert in respect of regional support for volunteering will be placed in the Belfast Telegraph, Irish News and News Letter on Thursday 15 March.

## Housing Benefit: Payment

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister for Social Development why the Housing Executive continues to pay Housing Benefit directly to landlords who have not provided a Tenancy Agreement or a rent book to their tenants.

**(AQW 9376/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The payment of Housing Benefit requires confirmation of a liability on the part of the tenant to make payments to his/her landlord. The manner in which this confirmation is determined is not specified in the Housing Benefit legislation. The normal method of doing this is by way of a Certificate of Occupation completed by the landlord and a further section of the application form completed by the tenant. In some cases, the provision of a copy of the tenancy agreement and rent book is an acceptable alternative but not a requirement under the regulations. In the majority of cases, the Housing Executive would not be aware of whether or not such documents have been provided by the landlord and consequently, this would not be a factor in the decision on the payment of Housing Benefit.

For the Housing Executive to withhold payment to a landlord, it would need to determine that the landlord is not a "fit and proper" person to receive payments of Housing Benefit. To establish that this is the case, it would be necessary to show that the landlord has engaged in undesirable activity in relation to Housing Benefit, for example, a refusal to repay an overpayment or confirmed fraudulent activity. Whether or not a landlord has complied with the terms of the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, (which covers the issuing of a tenancy agreement and rent book) is not something that can be taken into account in arriving at such a determination. Responsibility for the enforcement of the terms and conditions of the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 rests with District Councils and not the Housing Executive.

## Social Housing: Strabane

**Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Social Development what steps he is taking to provide additional social housing in the Strabane District Council area to address the need as evidenced by the increase in waiting list applicants from 551 in June 2010 to 652 in June 2011, and the increase in the number of applicants in housing stress from 194 in June 2010 to 240 in June 2011.

**(AQW 9382/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** In Strabane, the majority of newly arising need for social housing is met through re lets of existing stock. I am however awaiting a complete version of the draft 3 year new build programme and as part of the approval process I will further interrogate the figures to make sure that housing need in Strabane, as well as every other part of Northern Ireland, is being adequately addressed.

## Housing Executive Properties: Bangor

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Social Development (i) pursuant to AQW 86/11-15 and AQW 201/11-15, what is the asset value of (a) the 12 Housing Executive flats in Rathgill Park, Bangor; and (b) the pensioner bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor, which require multi-element improvements and are being considered for transfer to a housing association; and (ii) what was the asset value, at the time of transfer, of the 55 houses in Rinmore, Co Londonderry that were transferred from the Housing Executive to Apex Housing.

**(AQW 9403/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** I can confirm that the flats in Rathgill Park and the bungalows in Bloomfield Estate were last valued on 31 March 2011. Their values at that time were as follows:

- Rathgill Park flats in Bangor were valued at approximately £376,200;
- The bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate were valued at £2,023,500;
- The asset value of the 55 properties at Rinmore, Co Londonderry was £2,334,306 and the date of transfer to Apex Housing was 31 October 2011.

### **Welfare Reform: Communications**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Social Development what plans his Department has to revise its communications strategy to take account of the need to inform people more effectively about the upcoming changes to the welfare system.

**(AQW 9406/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** My Department recognises how important it is to inform people about the upcoming changes to the welfare system. A Welfare Reform Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Strategy has been developed which includes a Communications Plan, the aim of which is to send clear, timely and relevant messages to all of those people that may be affected by upcoming changes to the welfare system. This strategy is being kept under review to ensure that the messages which are being conveyed are targeted at the right people and that appropriate messages are being issued on the changes to the welfare system.

### **Welfare Reform: Advice**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he or his officials have had with advice organisations about the upcoming changes to the welfare system.

**(AQW 9407/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** My Department has, to date, engaged with in excess of 80 organisations (including advice organisations), through a range of activities such as workshops, project led presentations and speeches, regarding all aspects of the changes to the welfare system. This dialogue has been both general and specific in nature and in all cases has been tailored to the needs of the particular audience.

My Department has in place a Communications plan for Welfare Reform which outlines ongoing engagement activities with advice organisations throughout the passage of the Northern Ireland Welfare Reform Bill through the Assembly. This plan will be kept under constant review to ensure communication activities remain timely and relevant.

### **Welfare Reform: Preparedness**

**Mr Lunn** asked the Minister for Social Development to provide information on the preparedness of third sector organisations, with offices on Northern Ireland, for the upcoming changes to the welfare system.

**(AQW 9408/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** I cannot comment on the preparedness of third sector organisations that have offices in Northern Ireland for the upcoming changes to the welfare system. However, I can affirm my Department's commitment to stakeholder engagement (AQW 9407/11-15 refers), the aim of which is to send clear, timely and relevant messages to people that may be affected by the upcoming changes to the welfare system and to organisations who provide advice on welfare services.

### **Portadown Gateway Sites**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 8455/11-15 (i) to detail the infrastructure improvements required in Portadown to allow a development brief to be issued; and (ii) to outline the timeframe and methodology for the completion of the infrastructure projects.

**(AQW 9510/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** My Department appointed consultants in June 2010 to undertake a viability study on issuing a development brief for the Portadown Gateway sites. The study concluded that proposals to develop the more attractive sites, primarily publicly owned car parks, would be likely to trigger the need for substantial infrastructure improvements as a condition of securing planning permission.

- (i) The main infrastructure improvements identified were for improved access at West Street on to the Northway and the strengthening of the Shillington Bridge. In addition, the need to replace existing car park provision and supplement that proposed for additional developments would need to be addressed, potentially in a multi-storey facility.
- (ii) Currently, the infrastructure improvements do not appear on any government programme of work. DSD are working closely with Craigavon Borough Council to explore new mechanisms, such as Accelerated Development Zones, which might help to deliver the required infrastructure improvements. Workshops to explore the potential of this approach have been arranged for April 2012.

### **Housing Executive: Vacant Properties**

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has considered the creation of a scheme to bring empty homes back into use, similar to the UK Empty Homes Scheme.

**(AQW 9530/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** There is no single scheme for dealing with empty homes in the UK. In Great Britain each jurisdiction and indeed each local authority area uses a variety of interventions, ranging from advice and guidance, through innovative leasing arrangements, to enforcement action, to bring homes back into use and to stop empty houses becoming sources of blight.

The reasons empty homes are left vacant are varied and sometimes complex. However, I am determined that in Northern Ireland all possible interventions are tested so that those that work best can be put into practice. This will ensure that any scope to bring empty homes back into use is maximised.

I have therefore tasked the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to test the effectiveness and cost of various interventions in two pilot areas in Belfast.

The results from the pilots will inform a revised empty homes action plan for Northern Ireland.

### **Housing Executive: Ministerial Meetings**

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister for Social Development how many times he has met with the Board of the Housing Executive since May 2011; and what subjects were discussed.

**(AQW 9536/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** Whilst I have met the Chairman and other individual members of the Board at various meetings, I have formally met the Board of the Housing Executive once on the 29 February 2012 about the fundamental review of the NIHE and my housing priorities.

### **Welfare Reform Bill: EQIA**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has carried out an impact assessment on the proposals contained within the Welfare Reform Bill; and if so, to detail the outcome for each constituency.

**(AQW 9561/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the 1998 Act) requires Government Departments to promote equality of opportunity. In order to comply with this requirement and in accordance with Schedule 9 to the 1998 Act my Department carried out an Equality Impact Assessment of the proposals contained in the draft Welfare Reform Bill and issued the findings for consultation on 5 September 2011.

The responses to the consultation are currently subject to Departmental consideration and a completed Equality Impact Assessment will be issued prior to the introduction of the Bill.

Data is not collected on a constituency basis.

### **Social Housing Development Programme 2011-15**

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Social Housing Development Programme 2011-15.

**(AQW 9680/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** While I am now in receipt of a draft Social Housing Development Programme I am disappointed it remains incomplete and is simply not yet approvable. This is unacceptable and I have advised the Housing Executive of this.

Further meetings have been arranged and I remain hopeful of publishing the new 3 year programme in April/May, subject to the Housing Executive completing the necessary work to allow me to make a proper assessment.

### **Employment and Support Allowance: Foyle Claimants**

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Development how many Employment and Support Allowance claimants in the Foyle constituency have appealed against a decision made as a result of a Work Capability Assessment in the last six months.

**(AQW 9681/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The information requested is not available by Parliamentary constituency.

## **Northern Ireland Assembly Commission**

### **Assembly Chamber: Use of Laptops**

**Mr McKay** asked the Assembly Commission whether laptops can now be accommodated in the Assembly Chamber.

**(AQW 9141/11-15)**

**Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** All desks used by MLAs in the Assembly Chamber are fitted with electrical sockets which could allow laptops to be powered during plenary meetings. However, the Committee on Procedures is currently considering the use of electronic devices in the Chamber. If it is recommended that laptops may be used in the Chamber, the IS Office will consider how best to facilitate such use.

**MLA Salaries**

**Mr Beggs** asked the Assembly Commission whether a salary is paid to an MLA who receives an MP's salary; and whether any Member, who is also an MP has declined the MLA salary.

**(AQW 9830/11-15)**

**Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** Provision for Members' salaries is contained in the Northern Ireland Assembly (Members' Salaries) Determination 2000 and is subject to the provisions of section 47 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (as amended). If an MLA receives a salary as an MP, no salary as a Member of the Assembly is payable. Any salary payable to the MLA by virtue of holding an Office within the Assembly (for example, a Minister or Chairperson of a Committee) remains in payment.

From 1 April 2012, Members' salaries will be paid in accordance with the Northern Ireland Assembly Members' Salaries, Allowances, Expenses and Pensions Determination as issued by the Independent Financial Review Panel. The provisions of the 2012 Determination mirror those in place under the 2000 Determination.

Given that no salary as a Member is payable to an MLA who is also an MP, such a Member is not in a position to decline his or her MLA salary.



# Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 30 March 2012

## Written Answers to Questions

### Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

#### **Play and Leisure Policy: Funding**

**Mrs Overend** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding that is available for the implementation of the Play and Leisure Policy.

**(AQW 6818/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister):** A total of £1.5m is available in the 2012-13 financial year for activities related to children and young people, including implementation of the Play and Leisure Policy.

Officials are currently developing and costing options for delivery of our children and young people commitments, including actions for which OFMDFM is responsible under the Play and Leisure Implementation Plan. The outcome of this will dictate the how the available resources are distributed between children and young people priorities, including Play and Leisure.

#### **Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity: Discrimination**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the UK Government's pledge to combat discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, what consideration they have given to improving conditions for young lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, with particular focus on (i) eradicating homophobic bullying in schools; and (ii) improving the delivery of sexual health and relationship information within schools.

**(AQW 9233/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We will publish the draft Sexual Orientation Strategy and Action Plan for consultation later this year.

We understand that the Department of Education has issued Circular 2010/01 advising schools to take account of guidance produced by the Equality Commission on "Eliminating Sexual Orientation Discrimination in Northern Ireland".

We are aware of a range of concerns which transgender people wish to see addressed.

#### **Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission: Lay Members**

**Mr Weir** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what remuneration Lay Members of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission receive.

**(AQW 9491/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Lay members receive a daily rate of £294. This is a non-pensionable position.

#### **Woodland: UK Forestry Standard**

**Ms Lo** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether all the bodies or organisations within their Department's remit which own woodland are compliant with the UK Forestry Standard, including their Department, any arm's-length body and any organisation to which their Department provides grant aid.

**(AQW 9496/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The UK Forestry Standard defines a forest or woodland as trees with canopy cover of at least 20 percent. Tree canopy cover on the regeneration sites owned by OFMDFM does not exceed this limit, and as a consequence, the UK Forestry Standard does not apply to OFMDFM regeneration land.

However as owner of several key regeneration sites, our Department complies with a range of ecology and biodiversity legislation. In addition, all OFMDFM regeneration sites land will be regenerated in line with the Executive's agreed strategy for sustainable development, "Everyone's Involved", which was published in 2011. A copy of the sustainable development strategy can be found at: [www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/sustainable-development-strategy-lowres\\_\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/sustainable-development-strategy-lowres__2_.pdf).

### **Police Ombudsman: Appointment Process**

**Mr Copeland** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the appointment process for the current Police Ombudsman.

**(AQW 9701/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The outgoing Police Ombudsman was appointed on the recommendation of the Secretary of State in 2007, under arrangements which applied before devolution of policing and justice responsibilities. We now have statutory responsibility for recommending a person for appointment.

The process for appointing a new Police Ombudsman is being conducted in accordance with the principles and procedures contained in the Code of Practice of the Commissioner for Public Appointments and is subject to regulation and audit by the Commissioner. The post was widely advertised in December 2011 and an appointment panel, chaired by the Head of the Civil Service, interviewed twelve eligible candidates in February/March. We have since met with a number of candidates considered suitable for appointment by the panel.

### **Police Ombudsman: Appointment Process**

**Mr Copeland** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how candidates were assessed for the role of Police Ombudsman; and (ii) for their assessment of the suitability of candidates who applied for the post.

**(AQW 9702/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The process of appointing a new Police Ombudsman is ongoing, and the successful candidate will be selected on merit, based on the requirements of the post. An appointment panel has considered over 30 applications and interviewed twelve eligible candidates, conducting its assessment against the defined competences for appointment, which were agreed by us and detailed in the information provided to candidates.

### **Police Ombudsman: Appointment Process**

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what were the travel costs and associated costs of interviewees for the post of Police Ombudsman.

**(AQW 9747/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The Police Ombudsman position is a key element in the policing architecture. The post was advertised widely in the press in December 2011 with the aim of attracting high calibre candidates at local, national and international level. Those candidates travelling to interview were eligible for reimbursement of economy travel, subsistence and, in the case of overseas candidates, overnight accommodation costs incurred as appropriate at rates agreed in advance with officials administering the process. To date, these costs have amounted to approximately £4,010. Exchange rate variations may impact slightly on the final outturn of this figure.

### **Police Ombudsman: Appointment Process**

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the independent assessor on the interview panel for the short-listing of applicants for the post of Police Ombudsman was a voting member of the panel.

**(AQW 9748/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The process for appointing the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland is being conducted in accordance with the principles and procedures contained in the Code of Practice of the Commissioner for Public Appointments and is subject to regulation and audit by the Commissioner. The Code requires that all public appointments must include a demonstrable element of independent participation in the assessment of applicants. At the outset of the process, the Commissioner appointed an independent assessor to serve as a full participating member of the selection panel during sift and interview stages. Independent assessors are allocated by the Commissioner from a pool of trained individuals managed by the Commissioner's office with the expectation that the assessor will play a full, visible and active part in a public appointment process.

### **Jurisdictional Position: Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough**

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 9135/11-15, what is the current jurisdictional position of Carlingford Lough and Lough Foyle,

**(AQW 9749/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Any articulation of the jurisdictional position of both Loughs is a matter for the UK and Irish Governments.

### **Antisocial Behaviour**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) why the Programme for Government commitment to improve community safety is only articulated through a focus on anti-social behaviour; and (ii) why this is only assigned to the Department of Justice to take forward, given that early intervention and family support are essential in improving community safety.

**(AQW 9776/11-15)**



**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The Programme for Government (PFG) has a clear priority to “Protect Our People, the Environment and Creating Safer Communities” and emphasises the inter-relationships between all priorities in the document and the need for collaboration in and beyond Government to deliver outcomes. Our work to improve community safety goes far beyond the single commitment to addressing anti-social behaviour.

For example, in Priority 3, there are a range of commitments including reducing the level of serious crime, and tackling crime against older and vulnerable people. Taken together, this range of measures will empower communities, and reduce the incidence and the fear of criminal and anti-social behaviour.

In addition, in Priority 2, among the relevant measures are the commitments to invest £40 million to improve pathways to employment, tackle systemic issues relating to deprivation, increase community services and implement a £13 million package to tackle rural poverty and social and economic isolation. All of these will contribute to the creation of safer communities.

While a lead Department has been assigned to each commitment, this does not mean working in isolation. The PFG is predicated on an expectation that departments will work together to achieve its outcomes.

### **Investment Zones: Derry/Londonderry/Greater North-west**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether Derry will be regarded as an Investment Zone under the Social Investment Fund, or will it be included as part of the Greater North West Investment Zone.

**(AQW 9809/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** A number of potential zones, which included Derry/Londonderry and the Greater North West as potentially one or two separate zones, were proposed in the consultation document.

Having had an opportunity to consider the consultation responses, we recognise that the geographical spread of the zones has been one of the issues which received the most comment and on which people had raised key concerns.

Whilst decisions have not yet been taken in respect of the final location of the Zones, including whether Derry/Londonderry will be a zone, we can assure you that, in light of the consultation responses, we are giving careful consideration to this aspect of the Fund.

We hope to have the Fund operational as early as possible this year.

## Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

### **Hospitality: Spend**

**Mr Allister** asked Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 6317/11-15, whether the figures provided include the Department's arm's-length bodies; and if not, to provide this information for each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9247/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development):** Details of hospitality spend provided in response to AQW 6317/11-15 included figures relating to the Department's two Non-Executive Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), the Agricultural Wages Board and Drainage Council. The response did not include information relating to the Department's other Arms Length bodies;

Executive NDPBs:

- Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
- NI Fisheries and Harbour Authority
- Livestock and Meat Commission for NI

North/South Body:

- Foyle Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (Loughs Agency)
- Hospitality costs for these Arms Length Bodies in each of the last 5 years were:

|         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 2006/07 | £9,895  |
| 2007/08 | £28,552 |
| 2008/09 | £19,959 |
| 2009/10 | £9,310  |
| 2010/11 | £8,720  |

We have been unable to include figures for the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) for Northern Ireland. The LMC maintains records of hospitality expenditure, in relation to each specific work areas which provide hospitality in the course of their business activity and is not collated as an overall figure.

To collate these figures over the last five years would place a significant pressure on the small number of staff in the organisation and would not be possible within the required timeframe.

### Single Farm Payment: Average Amount

**Mrs D Kelly** asked Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the average Single Farm Payment, per hectare, broken down by county.

**(AQW 9420/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** As my Department is continuing to process claims to Single Farm Payment for the 2011 Scheme year, I will use information relating to the 2010 year in order to provide the most complete figure. During the 2010 scheme year 38,421 farm businesses submitted applications to the Single Farm Payment Scheme activating 965,963 eligible hectares of land for payment. The aggregate gross value of Single Farm Payments Entitlements activated and eligible for payment in 2010 amounted to £268,508,753, resulting in an average SFP payment of £277.96 per hectare. As SFP is not directly linked to individual field parcels it is not possible to provide information in respect of the amount of SFP attributed to field parcels on a county basis.

### Single Farm Payment: CAP Impact

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what modelling her Department has carried out on Single Farm Payments in advance of the Common Agricultural Policy proposals for post 2014.

**(AQW 9421/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Analysis of the potential impacts of the legislative proposals for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy is an important consideration when establishing a response and negotiating position. I have been able to draw on work done by my economists, which was made available to all in the recent consultation document on CAP reform and presented at a stakeholder conference held on 7 December 2011 at Greenmount and at various other stakeholder events since then.

I have also been able to draw on previous economic modelling work carried out by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute in conjunction with the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute of the University of Missouri (known as the FAPRI Project). The FAPRI team has been asked to analyse the market impact of the current proposals and the results are expected to be available later in the summer.

Further analysis as necessary will be undertaken as the negotiations evolve and, of course, will form an important part of the stakeholder engagement process when decisions have to be taken at a local level on the implementation options that will be available to us under the eventual reform agreement.

### Single Farm Payment: Small Farmers

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, for each county, to detail (i) the number of small farmers; and (ii) the average Single Farm Payment for small farmers.

**(AQW 9422/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** At present, for the purposes of the Single Farm Payment Scheme, there is no definition as to what would constitute a small farmer. Therefore, while it is possible to provide a breakdown of current claims by amount paid or number of entitlements activated, it would not be possible to categorise these into the particular category of small farmers given that this is not defined.

Under the CAP reform proposals, a Small Farmers Scheme has been suggested. Farmers participating in this scheme would receive a single payment, the value of which would be set by Member States according to certain criteria subject to a minimum of €500 and maximum of €1,000. This single payment would replace all other payments that they would otherwise receive under CAP Pillar 1. In theory all farmers could apply to this scheme but only those who would otherwise receive similar or lower amounts compared to the Small Farmers Scheme payment would be likely to do so. Further detail on this scheme and the impact on the north of Ireland is included in the Department's consultation document on the CAP Reform proposals.

### Rural Development Programme: Administrative Costs

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 8570/11-15, to provide a breakdown of how much each cluster has spent on administering the programme.

**(AQW 9443/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I would refer you to the table that formed part of my response to AQW 8570/11-15 and repeated below. The administrative spend is clearly shown under the column heading 'Admin Spend'.

| Cluster | Allocation | Project Spend | Admin Spend |
|---------|------------|---------------|-------------|
| GROW    | 8,890,899  | 1,480,765     | 579,973     |
| NER     | 13,181,300 | 2,198,665     | 962,112     |
| LRP     | 8,691,556  | 872,406       | 689,283     |

| Cluster      | Allocation        | Project Spend     | Admin Spend      |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| DRAP         | 13,498,066        | 1,665,270         | 921,019          |
| SOAR         | 16,731,839        | 1,775,988         | 1,256,558        |
| ARC          | 18,484,112        | 2,659,993         | 1,389,390        |
| SWARD        | 20,522,227        | 3,379,960         | 1,646,689        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>99,999,999</b> | <b>14,033,047</b> | <b>7,445,024</b> |

### Farming Community: Financial Assistance

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what financial assistance is available to assist the farming community to (i) advertise sales in the agricultural press in Scotland, Wales, England and the Republic of Ireland; (ii) provide transport for purchased stock; and (iii) provide transport for potential buyers from airports and ports.

**(AQW 9454/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Department of Agriculture does not provide financial assistance to advertise sales in the agricultural press, provide transport for purchased stock or for potential buyers from airports and ports.

Support is however available for groups of farmers through the Supply Chain Development Programme to investigate new market opportunities and improve existing marketing arrangements. The programme is part of the NI Rural Development Programme and is managed by Countryside Agri-Rural Partnership.

### Breeders: Genetics, Nutrition and Health Updates

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what support and information her Department gives to update breeders about genetics, nutrition and health matters.

**(AQW 9457/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department, through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), is providing support to breeders through industry training and knowledge and technology transfer (KTT) programmes. These programmes are underpinned by the DARD directed AFBI research work programme, which is worth approximately £8 million per annum.

For the 2011-12 year to date, almost 4000 farmers representing the beef, sheep, dairying, pigs and equine sectors have participated in training and KTT events to help them improve their skills and to be updated on the latest technological developments in relation to genetics, nutrition and health issues. CAFRE also provides extensive information in support of these programmes and publishes it in the farming and local press and on the [www.ruralni.gov.uk](http://www.ruralni.gov.uk) website.

### Rural Development Programme: Measure 3.6

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 8703/11-15, how many decisions on the eligibility for funding under each Measure of the Rural Development Programme have been taken at departmental level.

**(AQW 9485/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Decisions on both the eligibility and funding of projects are ultimately taken by the JCC, following a recommendation by the LAG. When requested, my officials provide advice on eligibility, to help inform eligibility decisions. Whilst my officials have offered advice on the eligibility of a number of projects, no decisions on eligibility have been taken at Departmental level.

### Dogs: Microchipping

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department will enforce the compulsory microchipping of dogs.

**(AQW 9487/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The control of dogs here is legislated for by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. Local Councils are responsible for enforcing all aspects of the legislation.

Section 2 of the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 introduces compulsory microchipping of dogs as a condition of a dog licence when commenced on 9 April 2012. From the same date, the Dog (Licensing and Identification) Regulations 2012 also make it compulsory to microchip dogs kept under a block licence.

Before applying for a dog licence from 9 April 2012, dog owners must ensure that their dog is microchipped and the valid microchip number is stated on the application form. It is a condition of a dog licence for the dog to be microchipped and an unmicrochipped dog will be considered unlicensed.

Council officers will have the power to scan any dog, including those held under a block licence, and to check their microchip details to establish the identity details of the owner.

It is an offence for anyone to own an unlicensed dog, unless the dog is exempted under the legislation. A Council officer has the power to require the production of a dog licence for examination. Powers exist in the Order to either prosecute or issue a fixed penalty to the owner of any unlicensed dog. It is also an offence under the Dogs Order 1983 not to comply with any provisions in Regulations made under Article 31 of that Order and this applies to an unmicrochipped dog held under a block licence, unless the dog is exempted under the legislation. A person found guilty of an offence shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding £1,000.

### Crossmaglen Republican Monument

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 8704/11-15, to detail the advice given by her Department on 26 January 2012.

**(AQW 9489/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The advice given by my Department on 26 January 2012 to the SOAR Joint Council Committee (JCC) regarding the application from Crossmaglen Memorial & Heritage committee to upgrade a monument, including the erection of 4 plaques, was that having considered representations from the JCC itself which comprises elected representatives from across the political spectrum and having viewed the precise wording that would go onto the plaques the Department's view was that the project could be considered eligible.

### Axis 3 Claim Errors and Payment Delays

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the Axis 3 claim errors and payment delays that were noted in the letter from her Department to the Joint Council Committee Chairpersons on 2 March 2012.

**(AQW 9508/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Details of the errors with claims submitted to DARD for payment as set out in the letter to Joint Council Committee Chairs on 2nd March 2012 are as follows:-

| Cluster Name | Application Ref. No. | Query Details  | Query Raised Date | Query Resolution Date | Claim Number |
|--------------|----------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| ARC          | 3860                 | Claim Not Authorised on System 2007 when submitted to CPU.                   | 16/06/2011        | 16/06/2011            | 1            |
| ARC          | 4108                 | Incorrect Business ID on Authorisation Form.                                 | 03/11/2011        | 03/11/2011            | 2            |
| ARC          | 4592                 | Claim form issued with resource and capital expenditure recorded incorrectly | 08/02/2012        | 08/02/2012            | 1            |
| ARC          | 4672                 | Incorrect Business ID on Authorisation Form.                                 | 03/11/2011        | 03/11/2011            | 2            |
| ARC          | 5780                 | Claim Form showing as Capital when exp. is Resource.                         | 03/11/2011        | 03/11/2011            | 2            |
| ARC          | 6269                 | No JCC / DARD Project Officer approval with Advance submission to CPU.       | 28/10/2011        | 28/10/2011            | Advance      |
| ARC          | 6453                 | Address on GAS and System 2007 differ.                                       | 04/01/2012        | 08/02/2012            | 1            |

| <b>Cluster Name</b> | <b>Application Ref. No.</b> | <b>Query Details</b>  | <b>Query Raised Date</b> | <b>Query Resolution Date</b> | <b>Claim Number</b> |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| ARC                 | 8513                        | Claimant is not a member of the Business.                                       | 28/11/2011               | 30/11/2011                   | 1                   |
| ARC                 | 8863                        | Address on System 2007 & address on GAS differ.                                 | 16/11/2011               | 18/11/2011                   | 1                   |
| ARC                 | 19087                       | NO BACS details held on GAS.  | 24/11/2011               | 24/11/2011                   | 1                   |
| ARC                 | 19104                       | Incorrect Private Eligible amount on Claim Form.                                | 08/12/2011               | 08/12/2011                   | 1                   |
| ARC                 | 19105                       | Business ID & Private Eligible amount on Authorisation Form incorrect.          | 11/11/2011               | 11/11/2011                   | 3                   |
| ARC                 | 32600                       | Address on GAS and System 2007 differ.  | 19/01/2012               | 13/02/2012                   | 1                   |
| ARC                 | 32737                       | Claimant is not a member of the Business.                                       | 25/01/2012               | 20/02/2012                   | 1                   |
| ARC                 | 32749                       | NO BACS details held on GAS.  | 08/02/2012               | 20/02/2012                   | 1                   |
| ARC                 | 32395                       | Address on GAS and System 2007 differ.  | 08/03/2012               | 15/03/2012                   | 1                   |
| ARC                 | 32382                       | Claimant is not a member of the Business.                                       | 14/03/2012               | 00:00:00                     | 1                   |
| ARC                 | 32705                       | Claimant exists on GAS to receive SFP only and at "Business Closed" status.     | 15/03/2012               | 15/03/2012                   | 1                   |
| DRAP                | 3678                        | Private Eligible amount on Authorisation Form and figure on System 2007 differ. | 23/11/2011               | 30/11/2011                   | 1                   |
| DRAP                | 3678                        | Private Eligible amount on Authorisation Form and figure on System 2007 differ. | 23/11/2011               | 30/11/2011                   | 2                   |

| Cluster Name | Application Ref. No. | Query Details  | Query Raised Date | Query Resolution Date | Claim Number |
|--------------|----------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| DRAP         | 4185                 | Matched Funding entered on System 2007 as Private Eligible, should be Other Public Body. | 23/11/2011        | 23/11/2011            | 1            |
| DRAP         | 4185                 | Matched Funding entered on System 2007 as Private Eligible, should be Other Public Body. | 23/11/2011        | 23/11/2011            | 2            |
| DRAP         | 4185                 | Matched Funding entered on System 2007 as Private Eligible, should be Other Public Body. | 23/11/2011        | 23/11/2011            | 3            |
| DRAP         | 4196                 | Confirmation of Resource / Capital and Private Eligible amounts.                         | 03/06/2011        | 03/06/2011            | 3            |
| DRAP         | 4196                 | Matched Funding entered on System 2007 as Private Eligible, should be Other Public Body. | 24/11/2011        | 24/11/2011            | 6            |
| DRAP         | 4196                 | Matched Funding entered on System 2007 as Private Eligible, should be Other Public Body. | 24/11/2011        | 24/11/2011            | 7            |
| DRAP         | 4196                 | Matched Funding entered on System 2007 as Private Eligible, should be Other Public Body. | 30/11/2011        | 30/11/2011            | 5            |
| DRAP         | 4470                 | Incorrect claim no. (2) on proforma e-mailed to CPU.                                     | 22/07/2011        | 22/07/2011            | 3            |
| DRAP         | 5050                 | Confirmation of Resource / Capital and Private Eligible amounts.                         | 03/06/2011        | 03/06/2011            | 1            |
| DRAP         | 5050                 | Revised Claim Form required due to deduction on System 2007.                             | 03/06/2011        | 03/06/2011            | 1            |

| Cluster Name | Application Ref. No. | Query Details   | Query Raised Date | Query Resolution Date | Claim Number |
|--------------|----------------------|---|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| DRAP         | 7747                 | Authorisation Form had incorrect claim no. & No Private Eligible. Explained to Kevin McGarry via phone. | 06/10/2011        | 13/10/2011            | 2            |
| DRAP         | 7747                 | Incorrect recorded expenditure showing on System 2007. Explained all to Kevin McGarry via phone.        | 06/10/2011        | 13/10/2011            | 2            |
| DRAP         | 7747                 | Claimant not a member of the Business.  | 06/10/2011        | 02/11/2011            | 2            |
| DRAP         | 8871                 | Confirmation of Resource / Capital and Private Eligible amounts.  | 03/06/2011        | 03/06/2011            | 3            |
| DRAP         | 8871                 | Matched Funding entered on System 2007 as Private Eligible, should be Other Public Body.                | 23/11/2011        | 30/11/2011            | 5            |
| DRAP         | 8871                 | Matched Funding entered on System 2007 as Private Eligible, should be Other Public Body.                | 23/11/2011        | 30/11/2011            | 6            |
| DRAP         | 28526                | Matched Funding entered on System 2007 as Other Public Body, should be Local Council.                   | 24/11/2011        | 24/11/2011            | 1            |
| DRAP         | 28527                | Capital and Resource amounts on Claim Form incorrect.   | 26/08/2011        | 26/08/2011            | 1            |
| GROW         | 2139                 | Payment split EU / NAT on Authorisation Form.   | 01/12/2011        | 01/12/2011            | 1            |

| Cluster Name | Application Ref. No. | Query Details   | Query Raised Date | Query Resolution Date | Claim Number |
|--------------|----------------------|---|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| GROW         | 6360                 | The Matched Funding figures on System 2007 are incorrect for the previous claim. On the previous claim Emma Stubbs pointed out on her form that the figures on System 2007 were wrong and that she would fix them. This was never done. | 06/10/2011        | 00:00:00              | 2            |
| GROW         | 6748                 | Incorrect Claim Amount on Claim Form.   | 08/12/2011        | 08/12/2011            | 2            |
| GROW         | 7519                 | Incorrect claim no. (1) on proforma e-mailed to CPU.  | 21/06/2011        | 21/06/2011            | 2            |
| GROW         | 7524                 | Payment was made but voided as BACS details were incorrect on GAS.  | 12/12/2011        | 22/12/2011            | 1            |
| GROW         | 33428                | Email sent to confirm correct claimant name   | 08/02/2012        | 08/02/2012            | 1            |
| GROW         | 33429                | NO BACS details held on GAS.  | 30/11/2011        | 30/11/2011            | 1            |
| GROW         | 33843                | Incorrect Claim amount on Authorisation Form.   | 01/12/2011        | 01/12/2011            | 1            |
| GROW         | 33844                | Payment split EU / NAT on Authorisation Form.   | 01/12/2011        | 01/12/2011            | 1            |
| LRP          | 2333                 | Incorrect claim no. (1) on proforma e-mailed to CPU.  | 29/06/2011        | 29/06/2011            | 2            |
| LRP          | 3818                 | Incorrect amount on Claim Form.   | 09/06/2011        | 09/06/2011            | 2            |



| Cluster Name | Application Ref. No. | Query Details  | Query Raised Date | Query Resolution Date | Claim Number |
|--------------|----------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| LRP          | 4290                 | Padraic Murphy submitted claim authorisation form with grant amount and Private Eligible including VAT even though the claimant is VAT registered. System 2007 figures were correct. Authorisation Form needed amended to total to the nett. cost only     | 16/11/2011        | 17/11/2011            | 1            |
| LRP          | 4365                 | Claim Not Authorised on System 2007 when submitted to CPU.   | 15/12/2011        | 15/12/2011            | 3            |
| LRP          | 4365                 | System 2007 showing as 100% EU funding rather than 50% / 50% split.  | 15/12/2011        | 19/12/2011            | 3            |
| LRP          | 32094                | Address on System 2007 was different from GAS.   | 29/07/2011        | 29/07/2011            | 1            |
| NER          | 6151                 | There are two Private Eligible total contributions of £16,398.83 from Moyle DC showing on System 2007 instead of one. This is because both the descriptions for these contributions are identical and the system doesn't know which one to put it against. | 27/10/2011        | 22/11/2011            | 5            |

| Cluster Name | Application Ref. No. | Query Details  | Query Raised Date | Query Resolution Date | Claim Number |
|--------------|----------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| NER          | 6151                 | The Claim Form for the above has also been filled in incorrectly. The figures are shown in the Capital section when this is Resource and the Matched Funding is split Other Public Body and Local Council when it shown as Private Eligible on the database. | 27/10/2011        | 22/11/2011            | 5            |
| NER          | 7893                 | Resource expenditure being claimed as Capital.   | 29/09/2011        | 29/09/2011            | 2            |
| NER          | 19189                | Incorrect Capital / Resource split on Payment Authorisation Form.  | 20/12/2011        | 20/12/2011            | 2            |
| NER          | 19318                | Payment Authorisation Form should state 'Final Claim' - YES.   | 07/12/2011        | 07/12/2011            | 3            |
| NER          | 21302                | Claim Not Authorised on System 2007 when submitted to CPU.   | 22/07/2011        | 22/07/2011            | 1            |
| NER          | 31759                | Incorrect claim no. on proforma e-mailed to CPU.   | 25/11/2011        | 25/11/2011            | 2            |
| NER          | 31856                | Advance request, with no authorisation from Project Manager or JCC.  | 27/07/2011        | 28/07/2011            | Advance      |
| NER          | 31856                | Matched funding entered as PE instead of Local Council   | 26/01/2012        | 26/01/2012            | 1            |
| NER          | 33078                | Incorrect Private Eligible amount on Claim Form.   | 07/12/2011        | 07/12/2011            | 1            |
| SOAR         | 4497                 | Address on GAS and System 2007 differ.   | 24/11/2011        | 24/11/2011            | 1            |

| Cluster Name | Application Ref. No. | Query Details  | Query Raised Date | Query Resolution Date | Claim Number |
|--------------|----------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| SOAR         | 4831                 | Claim Not Authorised on System 2007 when submitted to CPU.   | 09/06/2011        | 09/06/2011            | 3            |
| SOAR         | 4831                 | Claim Not Authorised on System 2007 when submitted to CPU.   | 09/06/2011        | 09/06/2011            | 4            |
| SOAR         | 4831                 | Claim Not Authorised on System 2007 when submitted to CPU.   | 09/06/2011        | 09/06/2011            | 5            |
| SOAR         | 5365                 | Expenditure incorrectly listed on Claim Print as Capital, should be Resource.  | 08/02/2012        | 08/02/2012            | 4            |
| SOAR         | 5365                 | Other Public Body' funding figures on System 2007 and Payment Authorisation Form differ.   | 04/10/2011        | 04/10/2011            | 2            |
| SOAR         | 5588                 | Address on System 2007 and GAS differ.   | 22/09/2011        | 22/09/2011            | 1            |
| SOAR         | 7112                 | Claim Form showing as Resource when exp. is Capital. Also No Private Eligible on Claim Form.   | 02/09/2011        | 02/09/2011            | 1            |
| SOAR         | 7112                 | Database amendment required - Private Eligible has CIK payment, this needs split on System 2007.   | 02/09/2011        | 02/09/2011            | 1            |
| SOAR         | 7112                 | Claim Form showing as Resource when exp. is Capital & Resource. Claim listed as Claim 1 (should be claim 2) and wrong Business ID on Claim Form. Also No Private Eligible on Claim Form. | 02/09/2011        | 02/09/2011            | 2            |

| Cluster Name | Application Ref. No. | Query Details  | Query Raised Date | Query Resolution Date | Claim Number |
|--------------|----------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| SOAR         | 7112                 | Database amendment required - Private Eligible has CIK payment, this needs split on System 2007 to show CIK.   | 03/09/2011        | 03/09/2011            | 2            |
| SOAR         | 7286                 | There are two Matched Funding contributions of £375.75 from Culloville showing on System 2007 instead of one. This is because both the descriptions for these contributions are identical and the system doesn't know which one to put it against so show's it | 05/10/2011        | 05/10/2011            | 1            |
| SOAR         | 7292                 | Private Eligible amount on Payment Authorisation Form includes Local Council contribution. Amended Authorisation Form showing split asked for from Emma McCabe.  | 26/08/2011        | 04/10/2011            | 1            |
| SOAR         | 7295                 | Claim Not Authorised on System 2007 when submitted to CPU.   | 11/01/2012        | 12/01/2012            | 1            |
| SOAR         | 7304                 | Element of claim incorrectly claimed as Capital instead of Resource.   | 22/12/2011        | 00:00:00              | 1            |
| SOAR         | 8026                 | Private Eligible amount on System 2007 incorrect due to PCU deduction on claim.  | 31/08/2011        | 00:00:00              | 5            |
| SOAR         | 8106                 | Private Eligible amount incorrect on Claim Form.   | 14/09/2011        | 15/09/2011            | 1            |

| Cluster Name | Application Ref. No. | Query Details  | Query Raised Date | Query Resolution Date | Claim Number |
|--------------|----------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| SOAR         | 8107                 | Claim Not Authorised on System 2007 when submitted to CPU.   | 10/10/2011        | 10/10/2011            | 3            |
| SOAR         | 28877                | Private Eligible figure on Payment Authorisation Form does not match System 2007 - CIK not added or split PE / CIK given to CPU. | 26/01/2012        | 26/01/2012            | 1            |
| SOAR         | 28877                | Private Eligible figure on Payment Authorisation Form does not match System 2007 - CIK not added or split PE / CIK given to CPU. | 26/01/2012        | 26/01/2012            | 2            |
| SOAR         | 31727                | Address on GAS and System 2007 differ.   | 19/01/2012        | 27/01/2012            | 2            |
| SOAR         | 31727                | System 2007 data (EU / NAT and Private Eligible) does not match that on Payment Authorisation form.                              | 14/02/2012        | 14/03/2012            | 4            |
| SOAR         | 31727                | Address on GAS and System 2007 differ.   | 19/01/2012        | 27/01/2012            | 1            |
| SOAR         | 31727                | There are no BACS set up on GAS.   | 19/01/2012        | 27/01/2012            | 1            |
| SOAR         | 31727                | There are no BACS set up on GAS.   | 19/01/2012        | 27/01/2012            | 2            |
| SOAR         | 33253                | No Organisation Name on System 2007.   | 08/11/2011        | 08/11/2011            | 1            |
| SWARD        | 1311                 | Address on System 2007 was different from GAS.   | 16/06/2011        | 16/06/2011            | 1            |
| SWARD        | 1498                 | Claim recorded incorrectly on claim form.  | 19/01/2012        | 19/01/2012            | 3            |

| Cluster Name | Application Ref. No. | Query Details  | Query Raised Date | Query Resolution Date | Claim Number |
|--------------|----------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| SWARD        | 1592                 | Authorisation Form submitted to CPU as all Capital expenditure, however 3 lines relate to Resource. Revised form required.                       | 06/10/2011        | 12/10/2011            | 1            |
| SWARD        | 1592                 | Expenditure wrongly classified as Capital on System 2007.  | 06/10/2011        | 11/10/2011            | 1            |
| SWARD        | 1646                 | Expenditure entered in Govt. Dept. Funding Total cell instead of Community Funding Total cell on Authorisation Form submitted by Leona Johnston. | 06/10/2011        | 06/10/2011            | 4            |
| SWARD        | 2058                 | Capital and Resource amounts on Claim Form incorrect.  | 26/01/2012        | 26/01/2012            | 3            |
| SWARD        | 2058                 | Private Eligible amount on Authorisation Form incorrect.   | 10/11/2011        | 11/11/2011            | 2            |
| SWARD        | 2429                 | No JCC / DARD Project Officer approval with Advance submission to CPU.   | 14/12/2011        | 14/12/2011            | Advance      |
| SWARD        | 2498                 | Payment Authorisation figures do not reflect those on System 2007.   | 19/12/2011        | 19/12/2011            | 2            |
| SWARD        | 2528                 | Expenditure incorrectly listed on Claim Print as Capital, should be Resource (Line 2).   | 22/07/2011        | 22/07/2011            | 3            |
| SWARD        | 2533                 | Address on GAS and System 2007 differ.   | 19/01/2012        | 19/01/2012            | 1            |
| SWARD        | 2593                 | Address query.   | 09/02/2012        | 09/02/2012            | 1            |
| SWARD        | 2593                 | Expenditure recorded on claim form incorrectly   | 09/02/2012        | 09/02/2012            | 1            |

| Cluster Name | Application Ref. No. | Query Details   | Query Raised Date | Query Resolution Date | Claim Number |
|--------------|----------------------|---|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| SWARD        | 2642                 | Address on GAS and System 2007 differ.  | 19/01/2012        | 19/01/2012            | 1            |
| SWARD        | 2658                 | Old Claim Form, wrong claim no. and Private Eligible and Other Public Body funding figures incorrect. | 29/09/2011        | 29/09/2011            | 2            |
| SWARD        | 2658                 | Address on System 2007 was different from GAS.  | 26/08/2011        | 26/08/2011            | 1            |
| SWARD        | 2658                 | Private Eligible and Other Public Body Funding amounts on Claim Form do not match System 2007.        | 26/08/2011        | 26/08/2011            | 1            |
| SWARD        | 7812                 | Incorrect Private Eligible amount on Claim Form.  | 23/12/2011        | 23/12/2011            | 1            |
| SWARD        | 8616                 | Item incorrectly claimed as Capital when it should be Resource.                                       | 08/12/2011        | 09/12/2011            | 1            |
| SWARD        | 8616                 | No Private Eligible has been recorded on the Payment Authorisation Form.                              | 08/12/2011        | 09/12/2011            | 1            |
| SWARD        | 8777                 | Claimant is not a member of the Business.   | 01/03/2012        | 06/03/2012            | 1            |

### Strategic Projects: Funding Applications

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many applications for funding for strategic projects have been received by (i) her Department; and (ii) Local Action Groups; and how many of these have been assessed as being ineligible.

**(AQW 9509/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** No applications have been received for funding for strategic projects by either my Department or Local Action Groups therefore eligibility checks have not been carried out. Joint Council Committees were asked to forward details of potential strategic projects to the Department to allow my officials to assess the type and number of potential projects that could come forward through an open call.

### Land Keepers, Land Wardens and Wildlife Rangers: Funding

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what funding is available from her Department for full-time Land Keepers, Land Wardens or Wildlife Rangers.

**(AQW 9514/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department does not provide funding for full-time Land Keepers, Land Wardens or Wildlife Rangers.

## Countryside Management Scheme: Staff Training

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what training staff within her Department receive on the Countryside Management Scheme.

**(AQW 9516/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** All staff who deliver the Countryside Management Scheme receive in-house training on an ongoing basis during team briefings and staff updates. In addition to this, staff may attend technical courses where a training need is identified. Within the last three years, staff training on the Countryside Management Scheme has included:

- Breeding Wader Habitats Management
- Field Boundary Management
- Grassland Management
- Heather Management
- Farm Waste Management
- Land Eligibility and Agri-environment Schemes
- Claiming Agri-environment Schemes on the Single Application Form

## Red Grouse

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what studies her Department has conducted, or are ongoing, on the Red Grouse.

**(AQW 9517/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The main work being carried out by my Department on red grouse is that being conducted as part of the Glenwherry Hill Regeneration Project (GHRP).

The GHRP aims to develop, implement and promote sustainable habitat management practices on the Greenmount Hill Farm to meet the needs of the wide range of habitats in line with sustainable livestock production.

The GHRP board membership consists of staff from the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Irish Grouse Conservation Trust (IGCT).

In addition to the main project partners, the GHRP Board also receives technical expertise and support from other organisations when deemed necessary – Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), DARD's Countryside Management Unit (CMU) and The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT).

One of the objectives of GHRP is to contribute to the requirements of the Red Grouse Species Action Plan, through creation of a sustainable grouse moor in the Glenwherry area.

The targets agreed by the GHRP Board include increasing the initial 9 pairs of red grouse to 15 pairs by 2014. This is in line with the 50% target contained within the Northern Ireland Red Grouse Species Action Plan (i.e. an increase from 200 to 300 pairs across the north of Ireland).

The project is showing early signs of success with numbers of red grouse having increased considerably with the current estimate being between 200 and 300.

## Glenwherry: Burning Blanket Bog

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what studies her Department has conducted on the burning blanket bog in the Glenwherry area of North Antrim; and when the studies will be completed and the findings published.

**(AQW 9518/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Work is being carried out on burning of blanket bog at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise's (CAFRE's) Hill Farm at Glenwherry as part of the Glenwherry Hill Regeneration Project (GHRP).

The GHRP board membership consists of staff from the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Irish Grouse Conservation Trust (IGCT). In addition to the main project partners, the GHRP Board also receives technical expertise and support from other organisations when deemed necessary – the NI Environment Agency (NIEA), Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), DARD's Countryside Management Unit (CMU) and The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT).

At CAFRE's Hill Farm, Glenwherry, heather on blanket bog is being burned in a planned and controlled manner to benefit red grouse as part of the Glenwherry Hill Farm Habitat Management Plan 2009- 2014. This plan was conceived and has been agreed by the GHRP board. The effect on the vegetation is being monitored annually by AFBI and has been fully documented. Final reporting of the current phase of the project will be during 2015. However, due to the success of the current phase, the willingness of external partners to continue, and the extended time frame of effects on blanket bog, it is hoped that this project will continue beyond 2015 and so provide valuable information on upland habitat management for many years to come.



### **Rivers: Use by Farmers**

**Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's guidance on the use of rivers by farmers for access to fields and for the transportation of animals; and whether her Department has conducted any studies on the environmental impact of tractors driving (i) along rivers; and (ii) across rivers for access.

**(AQW 9541/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Rivers Agency is the statutory drainage and flood protection authority for

NI. Under the terms of the Drainage (NI) Order 1973, the Agency has discretionary powers to maintain watercourses and sea defences which have been designated by the Drainage Council for NI, construct and maintain drainage and flood defence structures and administer advisory and enforcement procedures to protect the drainage function of all watercourses. Rivers Agency has no remit or role regarding the use of rivers by farmers for access to fields or for the transportation of animals and as such we have not undertaken any environmental studies.

### **Single Farm Payment Scheme: Payments/Fines**

**Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, for each of the last three years, (i) how much was paid to farmers under the Single Farm Payment Scheme; and (ii) how many farmers have been fined for failing to comply with the Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions.

**(AQW 9542/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** To date, my Department has paid out to farmers under the Single Farm Payment Scheme the sums of £288.6, £268.3 and £246.7 million for the scheme years 2009, 2010 and 2011 respectively. This information will be subject to change.

The numbers of farmers who were the subject of a financial penalty for failure to comply with the Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions, were 45 and 52 for the years 2009 and 2010 respectively. This information is taken from the data notified by my Department to the European Commission for the 2009 and 2010 scheme years in accordance with Article 84 of the European Council Regulation 1122/2009. Information in this respect for 2011 will be available in July of this year.

### **Omagh Show: DARD Attendance**

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department will be in attendance at the Omagh Show this year to provide a stand where farmers can raise issues of concern directly with departmental officials.

**(AQW 9568/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department is unable to attend every local agricultural show that takes place in the north in any one year. Unfortunately, Omagh Show is one of the few shows where we will not have a presence this year but my Department plan to have an exhibit there in 2013.

However, my Department always welcome the views of the agri-food industry and those in rural communities, at any time throughout the year. My officials are available can be contacted by phone or in person at the Omagh DARD Direct office.

### **Agricultural Shows: DARD Attendance**

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department will have a presence at all the agricultural shows in Northern Ireland in 2012, regardless of whether she is in attendance.

**(AQW 9569/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department will be taking trade space at eight local agricultural shows this year as well as the Balmoral Show, the Winter Fair and the International Ploughing Championships. The four local shows that we do not plan to attend this year will still receive Departmental financial support, subject to successful completion of the application process.

It is planned that my Department will have exhibited at all the local agricultural shows by the end of the summer next year and I plan to visit all the shows during my time in office.

### **Flooding: Finvoy Road, Rasharkin**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what work the Rivers Agency has carried out to alleviate flooding at Finvoy Road, north of Rasharkin; and on what dates the was work carried out.

**(AQW 9573/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Rivers Agency is involved in administering an enforcement action in relation to ensuring the free flow of a watercourse which affects the Finvoy Road.

### **Job Advertisement: Irish**

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 9191/11-15, how much it cost to place the advert in the Sunday Life on 4 March 2012; and how many people have responded to the advert.

**(AQW 9583/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The advert which appeared in the Sunday Life cost £1,426.37. This included publication in the Belfast Telegraph on Friday 2nd March as well as the Sunday Life.

Of the 33 applications received, 6 applicants indicated that they had responded to newspaper advertisements with a further 7 applicants signifying that they were made aware of the post in the 'press'.

### **Media Communications Protocols**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what media communications protocols exist between her Department and each of its arm's-length bodies; and to publish these protocols.

**(AQW 9589/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** No media communications protocols exist between my Department and each of its arms-length bodies.

### **Land Keepers, Land Wardens and Wildlife Rangers: Spend**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent on full-time land keepers, land wardens and wildlife rangers in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 9603/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department spent approximately £5620 per year in each of the last three years, for the rent and rates associated with the provision of a house for the gamekeeper at Glenwherry Hill Farm. My Department does not provide wages for the gamekeeper, who is employed by Antrim Estates.

### **Forestry Clearing Policy**

**Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department has any plans to improve its forestry clearing policy so that a cleared area is left in a more aesthetically pleasing state; and whether her Department has examined the policies in other regions, such as Scotland, to see how the policy can be improved.

**(AQW 9613/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department's woodlands are managed in line with the Forestry Standard which applies across all the devolved administrations.

The harvesting residues of brash and deadwood left on clearfell sites play an essential role in meeting our sustainable management objectives. Deadwood plays a vital role within forest ecosystems through their positive effects on biodiversity, carbon storage, recycling of soil nutrients, water movement and natural regeneration of trees. Deadwood also provides an important habitat for small vertebrates, cavity nesting birds, lichens, fungi and invertebrates.

The negative aesthetic effects of clearfelling can be mitigated through long term forest management plans by designing our forests to include buffer zones of native tree species along sensitive forest edges and riparian zones as well as considering lower impact harvesting systems on better soils where tree stability issues are less of a risk.

This approach is consistent with other regions, including Scotland.

### **Welfare of Laying Hens Directive: Non-compliant Eggs**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many illegal eggs have been seized by her Department since the introduction of the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive in January 2012.

**(AQW 9615/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** To date, my Department has seized no non-compliant eggs since the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive was introduced in January 2012.

EU Egg Marketing Regulations require all Class A eggs to be labelled with their method of production and this must be in conformity with production criteria specified in the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive. Any eggs produced in systems which do not meet these production criteria are prohibited from being placed on the Class A (shell egg) market but may be used for processing or disposed of as an Animal By-product.

To date, only a small number of consignments of eggs from other Member States have been encountered. Origin details of these consignments were checked against Member States' lists of compliant premises and inspectors examined the eggs under ultra-violet light. The eggs were found to be compliant with Egg Marketing regulations, including production method criteria.

### **Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to ensure that small scale responsible breeders will not be unduly penalised by the proposals contained in the draft Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

**(AQW 9667/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The commercial breeding of dogs is a legitimate business both here and across these islands and I do not intend to place any unnecessary burden on small, medium or large scale dog breeders. The draft Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations set out the minimum standards required for commercial breeding establishments to ensure that the welfare needs of breeding bitches, dogs and pups are met. Where good responsible breeders are already operating to these minimum standards, the costs to them to implement these Regulations will be limited to the annual licence fee and microchipping their pups and these costs will be very low.

The new Regulations propose to introduce a new breeding establishment licence system which includes a sliding scale of fees, determined by the number of breeding bitches in the establishment. The introduction of the breeding establishment licence is to ensure that Councils, who will enforce these Regulations, recover their full costs when approving and inspecting breeding establishments. I intend to ensure that the fees, whilst allowing the Council to cover their costs, are kept at a realistic level. The proposed licence fee for a small breeding establishment, i.e. with no more than 10 bitches, is £150. Whilst microchipping pups will be a compulsory requirement before the pup leaves the breeder, the breeder can microchip their own pups once they are competent at microchipping, so the cost should only be a few pounds per pup.

A draft Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) was carried out prior to the public consultation which took place from October 2011 to January 2012. A specific question was included in the consultation seeking evidence based information on any future costs to breeders. Whilst some stakeholders commented on possible costs, other stakeholders were of the view that most breeders already operate to the proposed standards, so little if any cost would be incurred. No information was provided from any breeders on actual costs they would incur.

I wish to see all dog breeding establishments in the north operating to good welfare standards and in the consultation responses a number of breeders welcomed these draft Regulations. The proposed Regulations will ensure all commercially bred pups have the best possible start in life.

### **Farm Animals: Illegal Dumping**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what legislation is in place for the prosecution of the illegal dumping of fallen farm animals; and what action she intends to take to address the increase in this type of dumping. **(AQW 9694/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The legislation covering the disposal of fallen animals is the Animal By-products (Enforcement) Regulations (NI) 2011 which implement EU Control Regulation (EC) No. 1069/2009 and Implementing Regulation (EC) No. 142/2011.

Under this legislation the disposal methods of fallen stock include rendering, incineration, utilisation for the feeding of dogs from recognised kennels or packs of hounds, with the residue disposed of by rendering or incineration. Provided there is prior authorisation by the Department, the disposal by burial or other means where access is practically impossible due to geography, climate or natural disaster may be carried out.

There is an authorisation allowing the burial of pets and equidae kept as pets.

Farmers must keep records of the disposal of fallen stock.

The responsibility for the disposal of fallen stock lies with the owner of the carcass. If this can not be determined, the occupier of the land on which the carcass has been dumped becomes responsible. This can include the local council, Forest Service, or a private landowner depending on the circumstances relating to where the carcass is dumped.

Failure to dispose of fallen stock by the lawful methods is an offence. If the person responsible for the disposal of the carcass fails to dispose of it, the Department as the Competent Authority may arrange for its disposal at the expense of the responsible person. If the person responsible cannot be determined, the Department may dispose of the carcass if it considers that there is a public or animal health risk.

The Department has no evidence to suggest an increase in the incidence of illegal dumping as records are not kept of these occurrences and there is no requirement on other public bodies to report these to the Department.

The Department monitors the disposal of fallen animals as part of the herd and flock audits it carries out. If any discrepancies are found, enforcement action is taken.

### **Tree Felling Licences**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department's proposals for a felling licence will (i) offer protection for ancient and long-established woodland; (ii) offer protection for any ancient woodland site planted with non-native species; and (iii) ensure that there is no net loss in the area coverage of ancient and long-established woodland. **(AQW 9699/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department's proposals for a felling licence will offer protection for ancient and long-established woodland from unregulated felling by permitting felling under licence subject to conditions to be set out in a felling management plan. Section 18(5) of the Forestry Act makes special provision for ancient woodland by requiring my Department to "have regard to the desirability of maintaining the special character of that woodland". The felling management plan will include details as to the characteristics of the woodland within which the proposed felling is to take place, details of planned felling and re-establishment operations and the species of trees with which the land will be restocked.

A condition of any felling management plan will be that the land is restocked in accordance with the rules and practice of good forestry as set out in the Forestry Standard. This recommends that on ancient woodland sites the features of ancient woodland remnants are protected and consideration is given to the progressive restoration to native woodlands.

My Department cannot ensure that there is no net loss in the area coverage of ancient and long-established woodland. While I recognise the need to protect ancient and long-established woodlands, from time to time as part of normal sustainable management some felling will be appropriate or necessary.

Finally, a further protection is provided by my Department's Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 which regulate deforestation for the purpose of converting to another type of land use.

### **Deer Stalking: Forestry Service Land**

**Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to open up Forestry Service land for recreational deer stalking.

**(AQW 9719/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Although deer stalking is a sport in its own right, it is usually conducted as part of an overall deer management strategy which seeks to create a balance between maintaining a healthy population and limiting the economic and ecological damage which deer inflict.

As a result, I am very interested in the development and subsequent engagement with deer management groups or partnerships which can consensually implement effective deer control across multiple land and sporting right ownership. This is an area we would like to see developed and integrated with our arrangements where we own the shooting rights.

My officials in Forest Service have met representatives of shooting and deer welfare organisations to scope how these organisations could take an active role in developing such groups through the involvement of their members and I am content for this dialogue to continue.

### **Rural Development Programme: Grant Application Process**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why the grant application process under the Rural Development Programme is not open as requested by Local Action Groups; and for her assessment of the impact that this will have on her Department's communication to the Joint Council Committee Chairmen requesting the urgent review and completion of Implementation Plans for the 2012/13 financial year and subsequent years.

**(AQW 9775/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The grant application process is open under the Rural Development Programme, and at least two groups have opened calls within the past two weeks. However, officials are working proactively with each cluster to assist in clearing their backlogs of applications before opening calls so that there is a clear indication of the value of uncommitted funds. Presently the current backlog of applications stands at 481 worth £33 m. This work is helping to inform the clusters review and completion of Implementation Spending Plans for the 2012/13 financial year and indeed subsequent years, and will assist them re-focus their delivery of Axis 3 funding to ensure that it is invested effectively in rural communities.

### **Bovine Tuberculosis: Update**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on her Department's measures to combat Bovine Tuberculosis.

**(AQW 9780/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My aim is to reduce and ultimately eradicate TB in cattle here and I will continue to work towards this end. My Department has a rigorous EC Commission approved programme for TB eradication in place. This eradication programme is vital in safeguarding our annual £1,000 million plus export-dependent livestock and livestock products industry.

Considerable work has been undertaken to enhance the TB eradication programme in recent years. We now remove as reactors those animals that give an inconclusive result to a second consecutive TB test rather than after a third test as before. We have improved communications with Private Veterinary Practitioners and strengthened the supervision process. We have improved DARD's own delivery of TB testing through monitoring Key Performance Indicators. We also use DNA identity tags on reactors to help reduce reactor identity queries, substitution fraud and associated disease risks.

However, TB is a very complex, multi-factorial and challenging disease that is difficult to eradicate. There is no simple, cost-effective, solution or 'quick-fix'. If there had been an easy solution, TB would have been eradicated before now.

Additional funding of around £4 million has been allocated in my Department's budget to conduct a programme of TB and wildlife research and studies to help ensure we have well informed and evidence based strategies to address the issue of cattle to cattle spread as well as the wildlife issue. We have engaged with industry and wider stakeholders to help us identify and refine our TB evidence needs and priorities.

The fieldwork for a TB Biosecurity Study was completed in 2011 in the County Down area. This Study is assessing selected cattle and wildlife risk factors for herds that have recently had a TB breakdown and herds that have no recent history of a breakdown in the same TB high incidence area. It is expected that the findings will become available later this year

The issue of TB in badgers and TB in cattle is a complex one. We know there is a link between bovine TB in badgers and bovine TB in cattle but we do not know the extent to which badgers contribute to the incidence of TB in cattle here. We will continue to monitor closely the progress in Britain on their proposals for badger control in areas with high and persistent levels of bovine TB. We shall be interested to see how the proposals evolve; how they are implemented; and whether they successfully withstand legal challenge.

We recognise that badger vaccination may be the most feasible solution in the longer term, but it could be some time before an effective oral badger vaccine becomes available, which can be deployed in a cost effective way. We will therefore continue to keep in close contact with the studies being conducted in the south of Ireland and in England to develop a viable oral badger vaccine and a cost-effective means of vaccine deployment. An international vaccination experts' scientific symposium is planned for 2012 to inform how best to proceed on badger vaccination.

We will similarly keep a close interest in developments to produce a viable cattle vaccine.

### Brucellosis: Positive Tests

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many Brucellosis tests were conducted in each of the last three years; (ii) how many of these proved positive; and (iii) what was the cost of the test to the farmer.

**(AQW 9783/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** (i) The number of animal blood tests for Brucellosis carried out in each of the last three years was as follows:

|      |                              |
|------|------------------------------|
| 2009 | 1,222,249 animal blood tests |
| 2010 | 1,177,898                    |
| 2011 | 1,171,045                    |

(ii) The number of herd level blood tests was as follows:

|      |              |
|------|--------------|
| 2009 | 19,666 herds |
| 2010 | 19,012       |
| 2011 | 19,555       |

From these herds, there were the following numbers of unique herd breakdowns:

|      |               |
|------|---------------|
| 2009 | 76 breakdowns |
| 2010 | 77            |
| 2011 | 25            |

The number of animal tests that resulted in a positive reactor being declared was as follows:

|      |                              |
|------|------------------------------|
| 2009 | 116 positive reactor animals |
| 2010 | 184                          |
| 2011 | 247                          |

[Of these results, the number of herd breakdowns is the most useful indicator of how disease eradication is progressing: there was a marked decrease in herd breakdowns from 2010 to 2011.]

(iii) The cost of the test to the farmer

At present DARD makes no charge to the farmer for the costs of routine surveillance or targeted testing. The Department covers the costs of taking the sample, transporting samples to the laboratory, the laboratory costs of testing, and administration, such as informing herd keepers of the test results.

The herd keeper is required by legislation to present animals for testing, hence must spend time mustering the required cattle.

Pre-movement testing is also required by legislation. Apart from the cost of laboratory testing, which the Department again covers, the responsibility for costs incurred lies with the herd keeper.

### Brucellosis: Eradication

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an estimate of when brucellosis will be eradicated; and whether she will commit to the cessation of testing for brucellosis and the financial burden that it places on farmers once brucellosis is eradicated.

**(AQW 9788/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Our Programme for Government objective is the eradication of brucellosis by 2014. Eradication will allow us subsequently to seek EU Officially Brucellosis Free (OBF) status.

Three years must elapse from the last confirmed brucellosis herd breakdown here, and at least 99.8% of our herds must have been brucellosis free for 5 consecutive years, before my Department can apply to the EU Commission to seek OBF status. These 2 time periods are not consecutive, but may run concurrently.

Achieving OBF status will benefit farmers from anticipated progressive reductions in the level of routine and pre-movement testing, which represents a £7 million per year compliance cost for farmers. To maintain OBF status, a reduced level of testing must be continued for a further 5 years, with some ongoing risk-based surveillance testing thereafter.

In order to secure these reductions it is essential for farmers to continue to observe good biosecurity practices and report any abortions in their cattle to DARD veterinarians.

## Quangos

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the quangos to which her Department makes appointments; (ii) how many members are appointed; and (iii) the remuneration paid to (a) the Chair; and (b) other members. (AQW 9803/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Full information about public appointments made by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is set out in the "Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report", published by OFMDFM. The most recent report covers the period 2010/11 and is available from the OFMDFM website or from the Assembly library (Reference number R351.41609 NOR).

## Rural Development Programme: Ministerial Meetings

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the meetings or contact which she or departmental officials have had with representatives from the nine Local Rural Support Networks regarding the new Rural Development Programme, with specific reference to the avoidance of unnecessary redundancies during the transitional period. (AQW 9867/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** I am assuming that your question relates to the new local rural community development support services which come into effect on 1 April 2012. Neither I nor my officials have met or had any contact with representatives from any of the nine Local Rural Support Networks regarding the new local rural community development support service, with specific reference to the avoidance of unnecessary redundancies during the transitional period.

## Welfare of Laying Hens Directive: Republic of Ireland Contact

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has had any contact with her counterpart in the Republic of Ireland to ascertain whether their egg producers are complying with the EU Directive on the Welfare of Laying Hens. (AQW 9874/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** In the run-up to the implementation of the Laying Hens Directive I had discussions with Minister Coveney, as we both worked to ensure that our respective enforcement actions would result in full compliance of the Directive. In addition, my officials and their counterparts in Dublin have worked closely during the past year to ensure compliance with the Directive. I am pleased that Producers in both the north and south of Ireland are fully compliant with the Directive.

The south of Ireland had an EU Food and Veterinary Office audit week commencing 12 March 2012 on the evaluation of their compliance with the EU Welfare of Laying Hens Directive. The Food and Veterinary Office complimented the south on how it had implemented the legislation.

## Coastal Erosion: Myroe and Magilligan

**Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that the sea has already claimed 56 acres of land in recent years, what protection will be given to landowners at Myroe and Magilligan against further erosion. (AQO 1621/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Rivers agency and their predecessors have previously carried out extensive works to the designated sea defences at Myroe which continue to provide a high level of protection to the land behind the structures.

There are currently no plans for future work at this location at Magilligan; however I will keep this situation under review.

## Coastal Erosion: Protection

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what protection against erosion exists for home owners whose properties adjoin waterways which are not managed by the Rivers Agency. (AQO 1622/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Under current legislation, my Rivers Agency has no statutory obligation to undertake works on undesignated watercourses to arrest erosion. The responsibility for this type of work rests with the land owner.

## Countryside Management Scheme: 2010 Payments

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Countryside Management Scheme payments for 2010 are outstanding; and what is the timescale for the release of these payments.

**(AQW 10070/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** At 28 March 2012, there are 86 out of 913 (9%) claims that have not been paid for the 2010 new Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS). These payments have not yet been paid because processing of these payments has required detailed administrative and technical checks. These checks have been necessary because a high number of non-compliances and over-declarations were detected at claim inspections. Payments will be progressed as soon as my Department is satisfied that the outstanding claims have been fully verified and payment is fully justified.

## Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

### Creative Industries: Budget

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment whether the £4 million budget currently allocated to assist the creative industries is sufficient.

**(AQW 9645/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** The diverse range of creative and cultural infrastructure, organisations and programmes funded by DCAL constitutes a creative pipeline from which creative people, creative ideas and creative businesses emerge and flourish. My Department's support to the creative industries should be considered within this wider funding framework and the vital role it plays in inspiring, nurturing and developing creative entrepreneurs and enterprises.

DCAL has limited resources with which to make its investments across the whole spectrum of culture, arts and leisure but over 2011-15 has prioritised significant resources to the Creative Industries Innovation Fund and wider sectoral initiatives to stimulate innovation, R&D and creativity and the sector's contribution to rebuilding and rebalancing the economy.

### Creative Industries: Ebrington

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps her Department will take to ensure that the Programme for Government objective of making Ebrington a hub for the creative industries is realised.

**(AQW 9646/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** My Department has provided funding and support to the Digital Derry initiative and its efforts to establish Derry as a leading place on the island to start and build a digital business.

This support has included innovative initiatives such as the pilot Culture Tech competition which supports local companies in developing commercially viable products and services involving digital technologies and culture. Funding has also been provided to Digital Derry to support the development of a major new conference and festival event devoted solely to digital culture and technology. This will take place in 2012 and 2013, as part of the city's tenure as City of Culture 2013.

The Culture Company 2013 Ltd is also being supported in taking the regional lead on Creativity Month in 2012 and 2013 and related year-long activities promoting creativity and innovation across the north. These initiatives, together with the Executive's commitment to City of Culture 2013, will support the sustainable development of Derry as a vibrant creative industries hub.

### Sport NI: Board Members

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the criteria used in the selection of members to the Board of Sport NI.

**(AQW 9675/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The most recent competition to appoint Members to the Board of Sport NI was launched on 15 September 2011. The following essential criteria were used in the selection of members:

- an informed interest in sport and the development of sport in NI and appreciation of the contribution of sport for NI society;
- experience as a practitioner or advisor in sport, education, finance or marketing/public relations;
- experience in governance in the public or private sector including: overseeing the development and implementation of corporate strategies, annual business plans and holding executive teams to account for delivery;
- previous membership of a board/committee which has responsibility for staff and/or financial resources;
- experience of management of change; and
- experience of working in partnership with different stakeholders (for example, government departments, other funders, public, voluntary or private sector agencies).

## Sport NI: Board Applications

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many applications were received for appointment to the Board of Sport NI.

**(AQW 9677/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The most recent competition to appoint Members to the Board of Sport NI was launched on 15 September 2011. A total of 29 applications were received for the positions.

## Sport NI: Board Representation

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps were taken to ensure that the membership of the Board of Sport NI is representative of society in Northern Ireland.

**(AQW 9678/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The most recent competition to appoint Members to the Board of Sport NI was launched on 15 September 2011. As part of the appointment process and to aim to ensure that the membership of the Board of Sport NI is representative of society in the north of Ireland, my Department wrote to all Section 75 groups prior to the launch of the competition encouraging them to promote applications from those within their sectors.

In the letter the Department reaffirmed its commitment to equality of opportunity and welcomed applications from all suitably qualified people irrespective of religious belief, gender, disability, ethnic origin, political opinion, age, marital status, sexual orientation or whether or not they have dependants. The letter also welcomed applications from women, people from minority ethnic groups and people with a disability for the positions of Member.

My Department is also committed to the principle of public appointments based on merit with independent assessment, openness and transparency of process. The competition to appoint Members to the Board of Sport NI was conducted in line with the Commissioner for Public Appointment NI's Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments.

## Community Relations

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what work her Department is carrying out to promote the improvement of community relations.

**(AQW 9728/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The remit of my Department impacts on the lives of many throughout our community. Sport, arts and creativity and linguistic diversity make a direct and valuable contribution to good community relations and the creation of a shared and better future.

The steps taken by my Department to progress the good relations duty during the past year are detailed in our Annual Progress Report 2010/11 to the Equality Commission.

My Department and its Arms Length Bodies (ALBS) continue to mainstream good relations considerations into policy development and resource allocation. The key departmental programmes and initiatives that aim to promote the improvement of community relations are:

### 1 Intercultural Arts Strategy.

The Arts Council is currently developing its Intercultural Arts Strategy for the period 2012-2017. The principal aim of this strategy is to create as many avenues as possible for minority ethnic communities to access and participate in the arts in the north of Ireland. There are six strategic themes including:

- Using the arts to develop community cohesion.
- Using the arts to increase awareness of diversity.
- Developing programmes that use the arts to develop good relations and as a vehicle to tackle racism.

The Arts Council will launch the Intercultural Arts Programme in May 2012, with dedicated funds available to community and voluntary groups supporting the themes of the strategy.

### 2 Re-Imaging Communities Programme

The Re-imaging Communities programme, now in its fifth year of operation, aims to build positive relations by the transformation of visible signs of sectarianism and intercommunity separation.

The objective of the programme is to help people feel part of the communities in which they live by removing displays of sectarian aggression and intimidation. The programme aims to promote better relations between current and new communities across the north of Ireland, whilst allowing for cultural expression.



**3 Museums**

Museums can help communities understand each others diversity, interdependencies and culture which in turn helps to improve community relations. One of the principles of the Northern Ireland Museums policy is that museums should play an important role in creating a shared and better future.

**4 Sport.**

The Sport Matters strategy recognises that well-organised sport can make a significant contribution to community relations. It commits Government to promote community cohesion through sport in the context of a Shared and Better Future and also contains a number of actions to help achieve this. These include actions to encourage under-represented groups to participate in sport and the provision of shared spaces for sport that promote community integration.

**5 Olympic/Paralympic Games**

The Olympic and Paralympic Games have been used as an opportunity to reconnect culture and sport and have been a catalyst to inspire communities across the North to participate in a diverse range of sporting and cultural activities.

**6 Cultural Awareness Strategy**

A revised Cultural Awareness Strategy was adopted as DCAL policy in March 2011. The main aims of the strategy are to address historical tensions by developing greater understanding, tolerance and respect for indigenous cultural traditions.

**7 World Police and Fire Games (WPFG)**

Two of the objectives that have been identified to support the legacy aspect of the 2013 WPFG are:

- 1 To establish a diverse pool of skilled volunteers for future events in the north of Ireland.
- 2 To increase mutual respect and understanding of young people towards the emergency services.

**UEFA/FIFA: Ministerial Meetings**

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any plans to meet with (i) the UEFA; or (ii) FIFA in the near future.

**(AQW 9733/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I have no engagements with UEFA or FIFA at this current time but may meet them in the future should this prove necessary.

**Golf: Children**

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how she plans to increase the number of children who play golf, given that only 30 percent of children have played golf in the last 12 months; and (ii) how she plans to encourage more girls to play golf.

**(AQW 9736/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Responsibility for increasing the number of children, including girls, who play golf in the north of Ireland rests, in the first instance, with the governing bodies for the sport, the Golfing Union of Ireland, Ulster Branch and the Northern District Irish Ladies Golf Union, NI Region. Given the range of sporting choices available in the north of Ireland, the current children's participation figures would suggest that these bodies are already succeeding in increasing the numbers of children and girls who play golf.

The governing bodies of golf can, if necessary, obtain assistance from Sport NI to help them further develop their sport. In the last three financial years Sport NI, which is responsible for the distribution of funding for sport in the north, has provided £412,855 to golf for this purpose.

Furthermore, the Irish Open is taking place in Portrush at the end of June this year. This will be a significant opportunity to promote the sport locally. My Department is part of the Irish Open Steering Group which is chaired by DETI.

**Team or Club Membership: Girls**

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she plans to encourage more girls to become members of teams or clubs, both inside and outside school.

**(AQW 9737/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, with the support of Sport NI and other stakeholders, including the Department of Education (DE), is currently implementing a 10 year strategy for sport, Sport Matters. Increasing the number of people in the north of Ireland, including girls, in membership of at least one sports club, is one of the key targets within Sport Matters. In addition, DE funds a Curriculum Sports Programme for pupils in Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. This programme aims to develop the physical literacy of our youngest pupils and instil in them a love of sport from a young age. The programme has been running successfully in primary schools since 2007/08 and the number of pupils participating this year is over 37,000, of which over 18,000 are girls.

**Team or Club Membership: Free School Meals Recipients**

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she plans to ensure that more children who are in receipt of free school meals become members of teams or clubs, both inside and outside school.

**(AQW 9738/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, with the support of Sport NI and other stakeholders, including the Department of Education (DE), is currently implementing a 10 year strategy for sport, Sport Matters. Increasing the number of people in the north of Ireland, including children in receipt of free school meals, in membership of at least one sports club, is one of the key targets within Sport Matters. In addition, DE, through its Extended Schools Programme, provides additional resources to schools with 37% of more pupils with a Free School Meal entitlement. Such resources enable those schools to provide a range of services and activities outside of the normal school day which aim to support and motivate disadvantaged children and young people to achieve their full potential. This can include becoming members of a variety of teams and clubs, including sports clubs.

**Loughgiel Shamrocks**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she plans to acknowledge the success of Loughgiel Shamrocks winning the All-Ireland Hurling Club Championship.

**(AQW 9800/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I have already written to the Secretary of Loughgiel Shamrocks to congratulate the team on winning the 2012 All-Ireland Club Hurling Championships. Furthermore, I attended a reception at Parliament Buildings in January 2012 which was organised to mark the success of Loughgiel's hurling and camogie teams during the 2011/12 season.

**Quangos**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the quangos to which her Department makes appointments; (ii) how many members are appointed; and (iii) the remuneration paid to (a) the Chair; and (b) other members.

**(AQW 9804/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Full information about public appointments made by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure is set out in the "Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report", published by OFMDFM. The report is available from the OFMDFM website or from the Assembly library (Reference number R351.41609 NOR).

### Sport NI: Capital Funding

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) amount of capital funding allocated by SportNI to each district council area in each of the last five years; and (ii) the amount of (a) capital; and (b) other funding that each sports club in Co Fermanagh has received from SportNI during this period.  
(AQW 9846/11-15)

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** In the last five financial years Sport NI has allocated capital funding totalling £62,339,048 to district councils in the north of Ireland. A breakdown of this is provided in table 1 below. During the same period, Sport NI provided £1,746,701 of capital funding and £12,449 of revenue funding to sports clubs in Co Fermanagh. Details of funding provided to each club are provided in tables 2 and 3 below.

**Table 1 - Capital Funding to District Councils**

| District Council | 2006      |         | 2007      |            | 2008       |            | 2009      |            | 2010       |            | Grand Total |
|------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
|                  | Exchequer | Lottery | Exchequer | Lottery    | Exchequer  | Lottery    | Exchequer | Lottery    | Exchequer  | Lottery    |             |
| Antrim           |           |         |           | £240,000   | £472,804   |            |           | £382,500   |            | £59,374    | £1,154,678  |
| Ards             |           |         |           |            |            |            |           | £216,057   |            | £48,950    | £265,007    |
| Armagh           |           |         | £830,693  |            | £455,000   |            |           | £1,334,284 |            | £134,519   | £2,754,496  |
| Ballymena        | £161,636  |         |           |            | £248,195   | £1,223,892 |           | £1,515,519 |            | £59,950    | £3,209,192  |
| Ballymoney       |           |         |           |            |            |            |           | £6,463     |            | £184,404   | £190,867    |
| Banbridge        |           |         |           |            | £245,000   |            |           | £7,394     |            | £7,010     | £259,404    |
| Belfast          |           |         | £565,773  |            | £1,354,264 | £1,998,811 |           | £2,917,333 |            | £1,602,580 | £8,814,640  |
| Carrickfergus    |           |         |           |            |            | £452,496   |           | £9,920     |            | £97,380    | £559,796    |
| Castlereagh      |           |         |           | £1,413,827 | £48,788    |            |           | £31,744    |            | £77,297    | £1,571,656  |
| Coleraine        |           |         |           |            | £1,502,856 |            |           | £126,589   | £300,000   | £109,899   | £2,039,344  |
| Cookstown        |           |         | £245,000  |            | £884,539   |            |           | £3,200     |            | £37,033    | £1,169,772  |
| Craigavon        |           |         | £840,000  |            | £371,093   |            |           | £2,060,804 |            | £712,150   | £3,984,047  |
| Derry            |           |         | £345,000  | £521,342   | £483,530   | £463,017   |           | £1,719,871 |            | £935,516   | £4,958,059  |
| Down             | £800,000  |         |           |            | £34,430    |            |           | £1,083,899 | £1,294,000 | £150,298   | £3,612,627  |
| Dungannon        |           |         | £937,000  |            |            |            |           | £814,586   |            | £101,868   | £1,853,454  |
| Fermanagh        | £405,123  | £41,098 |           | £220,000   | £633,975   |            |           | £606,113   |            | £129,210   | £2,035,519  |

| District Council | 2006       |          | 2007       |            | 2008        |            | 2009        |            | 2010       |            | Grand Total |
|------------------|------------|----------|------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
|                  | Exchequer  | Lottery  | Exchequer  | Lottery    | Exchequer   | Lottery    | Exchequer   | Lottery    | Exchequer  | Lottery    |             |
| Larne            |            |          | £520,000   | £2,145,892 |             |            | £122,335    |            | £101,600   |            | £2,889,827  |
| Limavady         |            |          |            | £558,167   | £461,632    |            | £5,300      |            | £559,500   |            | £1,584,599  |
| Lisburn          |            | £139,531 |            |            | £124,914    |            | £26,033     |            | £74,897    |            | £365,375    |
| Magherafelt      |            |          | £800,000   |            | £2,121,630  | £2,020,000 | £359,829    |            | £10,140    |            | £5,311,599  |
| Moyle            |            |          |            |            |             | £188,793   |             |            |            |            | £188,793    |
| Newry & Mourne   |            |          |            |            | £340,862    |            | £1,743,392  | £245,000   | £1,535,365 |            | £3,864,619  |
| Newtownabbey     |            |          |            |            | £146,529    |            | £16,763     |            | £114,184   |            | £277,476    |
| North Down       |            |          | £725,074   |            | £380,970    |            | £2,960,671  |            |            |            | £4,066,715  |
| Omagh            | £613,770   |          |            |            | £798,000    | £200,565   | £1,183,944  |            | £108,965   |            | £2,905,244  |
| Strabane         |            |          |            | £1,692,451 | £327,669    |            | £360,913    |            | £71,210    |            | £2,452,243  |
| Grand Total      | £1,980,529 | £180,629 | £5,808,540 | £6,791,679 | £11,436,680 | £6,547,574 | £19,615,456 | £1,839,000 | £7,023,299 | £1,115,662 | £62,339,048 |

**Table 2 - Capital Funding to Sports Clubs in Co Fermanagh**

| Date of Award | Sports Club                                       | Project  | Grant Amount      |
|---------------|---|--|-------------------|
| 29/2/07       | Enniskillen Gaels GAA                             | Stadia Safety Programme                          | £405,123          |
| 5/6/07        | Lisnaskea Emmetts GAC                             | Construction of grass pitch                      | £220,000          |
| 25/11/08      | Tempo Maguire's GAC                               | 4 room changing pavilion                         | £245,000          |
| 9/1/09        | Derrygonnelly Harps GFC                           | Construction of full size GAA grass pitch        | £142,302          |
| 9/1/09        | Brookeborough Heber McMahon GAC                   | Reconstruction of full size GAA grass pitch      | £68,987           |
| 9/1/09        | Derrylin O'Connells GAA                           | Construction of a natural turf pitch             | £137,604          |
| 14/8/09       | Ballinamallard United FC                          | Soccer Strategy Playing Facilities               | £87,050           |
| 21/10/09      | Aghadrumsee St Macartan's GFC                     | Construction of full size GAA pitch              | £205,704          |
| 21/10/09      | Ballinamallard United FC                          | Floodlighting of main pitch                      | £132,978          |
| 11/2/10       | NI Orienteering                                   | Development team equipment                       | £2,573            |
| 8/12/10       | Derrylin Boxing Club                              | Boxing ring, punch bags and associated equipment | £8,959            |
| 10/12/10      | Erne Paddlers                                     | Kayaking equipment                               | £26,778           |
| 16/12/10      | Enniskillen Gaels GAA                             | Safety Equipment                                 | £28,624           |
| 21/12/10      | Lisnaskea Rovers FC                               | Football equipment packs                         | £4,987            |
| 22/12/10      | Carrowshee Park/Sylvan Hill Community Association | Wheel away nets for multisport use               | £1,517            |
| 11/1/11       | St Molaise GAC                                    | Infrastructure works                             | £28,515           |
| <b>Total</b>  |   |  | <b>£1,746,701</b> |

**Table 3 - Revenue Funding to Sports Clubs in Co Fermanagh**

| Date of Award | Sports Club                  | Project   | Grant Amount   |
|---------------|------------------------------|---|----------------|
| 15/6/07       | Enniskillen Gaels GAA        | Safety management   | £2,449         |
| 25/3/09       | Knocks Grattans Hurling Club | Development award for abortive fees connected with grass pitch, floodlighting and changing pavilion | £10,000        |
| <b>Total</b>  |                              |   | <b>£12,449</b> |

**Boxing Clubs: Funding**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding is currently available from her Department for boxing clubs; and whether she plans to make any additional funding available.

**(AQW 9890/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding for sport in the north of Ireland. Sport NI currently has no funding programmes open to which boxing clubs could apply. I am aware, however, of the cultural importance of boxing to many people in the north and the benefits and opportunities it offers to young people, particularly those in areas of high social need. I have therefore asked Sport NI to bring forward a business case to help address the strategic facility needs of boxing clubs, some of which operate at the core of deprived communities across the north of Ireland and yet continue to deliver sporting success. As part of this process, Sport NI has identified an indicative funding provision within its Lottery reserves of up to £3m over the period 2012-15. The release of monies to boxing remains dependent, however, on the completion of a satisfactory business case.

### Irish Football Association: Funding

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure which teams in the Irish League Championship Divisions 1 and 2 are classed as non-designated for the purpose of funding from the Irish Football Association.

**(AQW 9989/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Responsibility for designating teams in the Irish League Championship Divisions 1 and 2 for the purpose of funding from the Irish Football Association (IFA) is a matter, in the first instance, for the IFA. Neither my Department nor Sport NI retains information on this matter.

### Horse and Greyhound Racing and Breeding: Funding

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department has allocated to (i) horse racing and breeding; and (ii) greyhound racing and breeding, in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 10062/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding for sport in the north of Ireland. Sport NI has provided no funding to horse racing or breeding in the last three years. Greyhound racing is not recognised as a sporting activity and it has therefore received no funding from Sport NI in the last three years.

### Northern Visions: Funding

**Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given the Arts Council's recent and sudden ending of core funding to Northern Visions for 2012/13, what plans she has to provide alternative core funding to the organisation.

**(AQW 10083/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** My Department does not fund organisations directly. DCAL funding in support of arts and cultural activities is disbursed through its Arms Length Bodies such as the Arts Council.

Today's economic climate is very challenging for all arts and cultural organisations, with many organisations competing for funding and I understand from the Arts Council that Northern Vision's application to the Council's Annual Funding Programme did not, in a highly competitive round, demonstrate a sufficient level of arts content.

Northern Visions has been advised to contact the relevant officer to discuss the failings of the application with a view to applying to Lottery project funding which is currently open.

## Department of Education

### Schoolchildren: Non-attendance

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education how many school-age children are currently not attending (i) primary school; and (ii) post-primary school, broken down by Education and Library Board area.

**(AQW 9311/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education):** The answer refers to:

- 1 Children with a bad absenteeism record;
- 2 Children receiving their education other than at school such as, hospital or young offenders;
- 3 Children who are home schooled; and
- 4 Children who do not fall into any of the above and are not registered.

Current numbers in categories 1 – 3 have been provided by the Education and Library Boards and are presented in the table attached. Data on school attendance for the 2010/11 school year will be published on the Department's website on 29 March 2012.

Parents of every child of compulsory school age are legally required to ensure that their child receives full-time education suitable to his or her age, ability and aptitude; either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. There is no legal requirement for them to register the child with a school.

If parents choose to home educate there is no legal requirement for them to advise their Education and Library Board or the Department of their decision. The information in the table refers to the number of children for whom the ELB has received notifications that they are being home educated. The numbers fluctuate during the course of a year and the figures provided by the ELBs therefore reflect the position on the date the information was requested.

The Department does not have information on children who do not fall into any of the above categories and are not registered with a school. However the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority may provide an opportunity to reconcile on a regional basis the children registered in school against the child health database.

To ask the Minister of Education how many school-age children are currently not attending (i) primary school; and (ii) post-primary school, broken down by Education and Library Board area -

AQW 9311/11-15

The answer was to include all the categories below:

- 1 Children with a bad absenteeism record
- 2 Children receiving their education elsewhere, such as, hospital or young offenders
- 3 Children who are home schooled

| Question / ELB   | BELB    |     | SEELB   |     | SELB    |     | WELB    |     | NEELB   |     |
|--|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|-----|
|  | Primary | PP  | Primary | PP  | Primary | PP  | Primary | PP  | Primary | PP  |
| Number of children currently referred to ELBs because of poor attendance     | 182     | 631 | 47      | 259 | 158     | 537 | 184     | 540 | 176     | 655 |
| Number of children currently receiving education other than at school        | 4       | 209 | 8       | 116 | 18      | 131 | 1       | 131 | 23      | 212 |
| Number of children that are being 'home-schooled' ie Elective Home Education | 5       | 1   | 26      | 26  | 13      | 26  | 12      | 23  | 30      | 17  |

| Totals   | Primary | PP   |
|--|---------|------|
| Number of attendance cases currently referred to ELBs because of poor attendance | 747     | 2622 |
| Number of children currently receiving education elsewhere                       | 54      | 799  |
| Number of children that are being 'home-schooled' ie Elective Home Education     | 86      | 93   |

### St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor: Newbuild Fees

**Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of the £517,000 spent to date on consultancy and architects' fees for the proposed new build at St. Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor.

**(AQW 9501/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Department's records in relation to expenditure on those schools which have been planned but not yet built show that a figure of £519k was spent on St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor. However, in this particular case this includes an amount of £459k for enabling works to facilitate the amalgamation of the former Convent of Mercy Girls' School and St Mary's Boys' Primary

School in Rostrevor to be known as St Bronagh's Primary School. These enabling works were listed under the same accounting code as that used for professional fees. The actual fees incurred in relation to the planning of the proposed new build for St Bronagh's Primary School amounts to £60,616.08 broken down as follows:

|                          |                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| NI Water                 | £90.47            |
| BREEAM                   | £881.25           |
| Feasibility Study Review | £15,441.74        |
| Insurance                | £859.95           |
| Mechanical & Electrical  | £1,997.50         |
| Architect                | £13,789.51        |
| Structural Engineer      | £8,485.87         |
| Quantity Surveyor        | £1,586.25         |
| Project Manager          | £15,664.63        |
| Advertising              | £1,818.91         |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>£60,616.08</b> |

### Area-based Planning: Seminars

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education whether the other Education and Library Boards have followed the example of the North Eastern Board in holding seminars on the Area Based Planning process for school principals and governors.

**(AQW 9523/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** It is the responsibility of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) to determine the frequency and number of meetings required to deliver area plans. I would, however, expect that the ELBs in conjunction with CCMS and other sectors would keep all schools informed and seek appropriate participation throughout this process. My Department, through the Area Planning Co-ordination Group, will seek assurances that mechanisms are in place to facilitate effective engagement with the other sectors.

### Schools: Viability Audit

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education why the schools audit used different academic criteria for grammar and non-grammar schools.

**(AQW 9535/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The educational attainment criteria used in the viability audits were agreed by the Viability Working Group and were, in the professional judgement of those involved in the group, appropriate indicators of performance for the relevant categories of schools.

As I have already indicated in my response to oral questions on 13 March, Grammar schools that tell us that their academic ability outstrips all other sectors and they offer higher quality education. It is therefore entirely appropriate that they are measured against a higher benchmark than any other sector.

### Schools: Temporary Teaching Positions

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Education how many temporary teaching positions at schools have been filled in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 9584/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The number of temporary teaching positions filled in each of the last three years is as follows:-

| Employing Authority | 2008/2009  | 2009/2010  | 2010/2011  |
|---------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| BELB                | 16         | 27         | 26         |
| WELB                | 42         | 37         | 30         |
| NEELB               | 45         | 39         | 33         |
| SEELB               | 72         | 99         | 75         |
| SELB                | 58         | 58         | 45         |
| CCMS                | 161        | 206        | 160        |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>394</b> | <b>466</b> | <b>369</b> |

### Schools: Substitute or Temporary Teachers

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 8580/11-15, how many teachers at (i) primary school; and (ii) post-primary school levels, who have received enhanced redundancy or early retirement packages, have been re-employed to carry out substitute or temporary work in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 9586/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The information requested is as follows:

**Number of teachers who have received enhanced compensation for redundancy or premature retirement benefits and have been re-employed in a substitute or temporary capacity**

| Financial year | Primary Sector | Post-primary sector | Others | Total       |
|----------------|----------------|---------------------|--------|-------------|
| 2008/09        | 768            | 911                 | 52     | <b>1731</b> |
| 2009/10        | 696            | 867                 | 53     | <b>1616</b> |
| 2010/11        | 572            | 786                 | 51     | <b>1409</b> |

The "others" column includes teachers whose last school before receiving enhanced compensation for redundancy or premature retirement benefits did not fall specifically into either the primary or post-primary sector.



The above figures exclude teachers whose redundancy compensation was not paid through the Department's payroll.

### Schools: Teaching Posts

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Education how many teaching posts advertised in the last three years required applicants to have (i) a minimum of one year's experience; and (ii) no teaching experience.

**(AQW 9587/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The number of teaching posts advertised in the last three years which required applicants to have (i) a minimum of one year's experience; and (ii) no teaching experience is as follows:-

| Employing Authority | 2008/2009  |            | 2009/2010  |            | 2010/2011  |            |
|---------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
|                     | (i)        | (ii)       | (i)        | (ii)       | (i)        | (ii)       |
| BELB                | 43         | 31         | 22         | 12         | 19         | 9          |
| WELB                | 6          | 1          | 2          | 3          | 15         | 1          |
| NEELB               | 30         | 11         | 28         | 14         | 27         | 11         |
| SEELB               | 61         | 32         | 51         | 20         | 45         | 30         |
| SELB                | 25         | 7          | 36         | 13         | 28         | 16         |
| CCMS                | 125        | 177        | 128        | 214        | 72         | 110        |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>290</b> | <b>259</b> | <b>267</b> | <b>276</b> | <b>206</b> | <b>177</b> |

### Shared Education Advisory Group

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) terms of reference; and (ii) timescale for the establishment of the Shared Education Advisory Group.

**(AQW 9617/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The terms of reference have not yet been drawn up. I intend to establish the group in the coming months.

### Post-primary Schools: Governors Holding Elected Office

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Education to list each District Councillor, MLA, MP, or MEP who currently serves on a Board of Governors at a post-primary school, including the name of each school and whether the school currently uses academic selection as an admission criteria.

**(AQW 9689/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Department does not collect information about the elected political offices held by school governors, nor are school governors required to provide such information to the Department.

### Craigavon Area Learning Community: Financial Difficulties

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education (i) what actions his Department and the Southern Education and Library Board has taken to work with the schools in the Craigavon Area Learning Community which are facing financial difficulties; and (ii) what guarantees he can give to the schools which have taken financially difficult decisions, including cost-cutting and redundancies, that they will not be adversely affected because of the financial difficulties faced by other schools.

**(AQW 9725/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** All schools receive a fully delegated budget under the Common Funding Scheme arrangements on an equitable basis, irrespective of geographical location. I announced on 12 January 2012, that I had secured additional funding for the Education sector of £120m, which will go straight to school budgets over the next three years. My Departmental officials have written to all schools, including those in the Craigavon Area Learning Community, detailing the planned funding available for distribution to schools under the Common Funding Formula arrangements for the next three years. This information enables schools to review their own financial plans and to consider any actions, if required they need to take to ensure they are able to remain within budget. Whilst the additional allocations over the next three years are welcome, it is important to stress that these additional funds have alleviated rather than eradicated the financial pressures on all schools.

In addition to the notifications which have issued from my department, the Southern Education and Library Board continues to work with all schools in the Craigavon Area Learning Community to ensure that appropriate responses are made in relation to their financial position.

I continue to encourage schools to share their resources and expertise within Area Learning Communities for the benefit of pupils and the wider school community. Collaborative arrangements between schools that are viable and sustainable are more likely to guarantee the delivery of high quality education. I have therefore commissioned the Education and Library Boards

working closely with CCMS and the other sectors to undertake strategic area planning to ensure that the education system comprises a network of viable and sustainable schools.

### **Ballykeigle Primary School, Comber: Future Viability**

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Education when he expects to make a decision on the future viability of Ballykeigle Primary School, Strangford.

**(AQW 9744/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The development proposal for the closure of Ballykeigle Primary School was published by the South Eastern Education & Library Board on 13 December 2011 and the statutory 2 month consultation period ended on 13 February 2012.

My decision on the development proposal was announced on Wednesday 21 March. I have approved the proposal for closure with effect from 31 August 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.

I would like to pay tribute to all those connected with Ballykeigle Primary School who over many years have shown their commitment and dedication to pupils in the locality.

### **Education and Library Boards: Appointment of Chief Executive**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education whether he will publish the agreed procedures for the appointment of a chief executive to an Education and Library Board.

**(AQW 9771/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

### **Middletown Centre for Autism: Uptake of Services**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education to detail the 37 special schools that have taken advantage of the services of the Middletown Autism Centre; and of which services each school has availed.

**(AQW 9784/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The services delivered to special schools by the Middletown Centre for Autism are shown in the table below:

| <b>School name</b>                    | <b>Training Delivered to School Staff</b> | <b>Training Delivered to Parents</b> | <b>Delivery of Intensive Pupil / Teacher Support</b> | <b>Delivery of Attention Autism Programme</b> |
|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Cedar Lodge Special School            | X   | X                                    |  |   |
| Fleming Fulton Special School         | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Harberton Special School              | X   | X                                    | X  | X   |
| Mitchell House Special School         | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Greenwood House Assessment Centre     | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Park Education Resource Centre        | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Glenveagh Special School              | X   | X                                    | X  | X   |
| Oakwood School and Assessment Centre  | X   |                                      |  |   |
| St Gerard's Education Resource Centre | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Belmont House Special School          | X   | X                                    |  |   |
| Erne Special School                   | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Foyleview Special School              | X   |                                      |  |   |

| <b>School name</b>                 | <b>Training Delivered to School Staff</b> | <b>Training Delivered to Parents</b> | <b>Delivery of Intensive Pupil / Teacher Support</b> | <b>Delivery of Attention Autism Programme</b> |
|------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Knockavoe School & Resource Centre | X   | X                                    |  | X   |
| Elmbrook Special School            | X   | X                                    |  |   |
| Arvalee School and Resource Centre | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Rossmar Special School             | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Rosstulla Special School           | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Sandelford Special School          | X   | X                                    |  | X   |
| Roddensvale Special School         | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Thornfield Special School          | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Kilronan Special School            | X   | X                                    |  |   |
| Riverside Special School           | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Castletower School                 | X   | X                                    |  |   |
| Jordanstown Special School         | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Beechlawn Special School           | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Killard House Special School       | X   | X                                    |  |   |
| Brookfield Special School          | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Longstone Special School           | X   | X                                    |  |   |
| Parkview Special School            | X   | X                                    | X  | X   |
| Knockevin Special School           | X   | X                                    | X  | X   |
| Tor Bank Special School            | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Clifton Special School             | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Rathore School                     | X   | X                                    | X  | X   |
| Donard Special School              | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Ceara Special School               | X   |                                      |  |   |
| Sperrinview Special School         | X   |                                      |  | X   |
| Lisanally Special School           | X   |                                      |  |   |

### Middletown Centre for Autism: Uptake of Services

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education how many children have availed of the services of Middletown Autism Centre to date. (AQW 9814/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** Middletown Centre staff have provided direct interventions to 10 children on a rolling basis through an outreach service which offers trans-disciplinary assessment by advice and guidance teams, and have supported some 183 children with outreach support and a further 411 children by helping whole schools develop an ASD competent environment.

### Schools Closures: NEELB

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education (i) to list the closed schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area which have been vandalised in the last 24 months; (ii) what action the Board is taking to secure the sites; and (iii) for his Department's assessment of the action being taken to secure the sites.

(AQW 9816/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** The North Eastern Education and Library Board is responsible for securing the sites of closed schools in its area within the controlled sector only. Within the maintained sector responsibility is solely a Trustee matter.

Closed controlled schools vandalised within the last 24 months and the action taken by the Board to secure the sites are set out below.

| Closed School                 | Action taken to secure the building/site  |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Glenarm Primary School        | Windows and door boarded up.  |
| Ballee Primary School         | Site secured by existing 2.4m high boundary fence.  |
| Antiville Primary School      | The perimeter fence to secure the site is inspected and repaired as necessary.  |
| Ballypriormore Primary School | Windows and doors boarded up.   |
| Maghera High School           | Windows and doors boarded up. In light of several break-ins at this property, the Board has liaised with PSNI and is currently erecting fencing & signage around the school building. |

Boards are required to secure empty school sites while they seek to dispose of surplus properties, which should be within 3 years of a school closure. The department recognises the level of vandalism which persists with closed schools and expects all Boards to meet their obligations in relation to securing vacant sites.

My Department has facilitated discussions between the Strategic Investment Board's Asset Management Unit and the North Eastern Education and Library Board in pursuing efficient disposal of closed schools.

### South Eastern Education and Library Board: Chief Executive

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Education (i) who sat on the interview panel for the post of Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board; (ii) how many applications were received; (iii) how many candidates were interviewed; and (iv) to outline the role of his Department in the appointment of the successful candidate.

(AQW 9823/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:**

#### Temporary Appointment – SEELB Chief Executive

##### (I) Interview Panel

##### Voting Members

Chair of Commissioners (SEELB)

Commissioner (SEELB)

Commissioner (SEELB)

##### Non-Voting Member

Nominee, Representative for Permanent Secretary, DE

**In Attendance**

Independent Assessor  
 Independent Assessor  
 Deputy Secretary, Staff Commission ELBs

**(ii) Applications Received**

There was one application received for the post.

**(iii) Number of Candidates Interviewed**

There was one applicant interviewed.

**(iv) ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT**

The role of the Department of Education is provided for in Article 30 of the Education and Libraries (N I) Order 2003.

The Department must approve the appointment. In order to obtain such approval the Board is required to submit to the Department the name(s), qualifications and previous experience of those applicants considered by the Board to be suitable for appointment, indicating the name of the person whom the Board proposes to appoint.

Article 30 of the above mentioned Order also provides for the role of the Staff Commission in the appointment of the Chief Executive of Education and Library Boards.

In accordance with the Appointments Procedure for Chief Executives, approved by the Staff Commission, the Permanent Secretary (or his/her nominee ) is entitled to attend the selection process as a non voting member of the panel.

**Schools: Admissions to Preparatory Departments**

**Mr Douglas** asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of admissions to the preparatory departments at (i) Campbell College, Belfast; (ii) Sullivan Upper School, Hollywood; (iii) Strathearn School, Belfast; and (iv) Bloomfield Collegiate School, Belfast, in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9829/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The information requested is detailed in the table below.

**Year 1 enrolments in specified preparatory departments, 2007/08 – 2011/12**

| School name                       | 2007/ 08 | 2008/ 09 | 2009/ 10 | 2010/ 11 | 2011/ 12 |
|-----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Bloomfield Collegiate Prep. Dept. | 4        | 5        | n/a      | n/a      | n/a      |
| Campbell College Junior School    | 21       | 24       | 21       | 32       | 34       |
| Strathearn School Prep. Dept.     | 22       | 16       | 21       | 17       | 24       |
| Sullivan Upper School Prep. Dept. | 26       | 26       | 26       | 24       | 27       |

**Source:** NI school census

**Note:**

- 1 Bloomfield Collegiate preparatory department stopped admitting year one pupils in 2009/10 and closed in 2011/12.
- 2 Admissions taken as those pupils starting in Year 1.

**School Leavers: Hearing Loss/Deafness**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the total percentage of school leavers with hearing loss/deafness who achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A\*-C and who attended (a) a Hearing Impaired Unit; (b) Jordanstown School; (c) The Mary Hare School, Berkshire; and (d) a mainstream school, broken down by sector.

**(AQW 9877/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** While the Department collects data on the achievement of school leavers with hearing impairments who attended schools here, the data does not identify separately those who had attended a hearing impaired unit.

The Department does not hold information on the attainment of pupils from here who attended the Mary Hare School but I understand that the school publishes information on the examination performance of all its pupils in its prospectus.

The table below provides information on the percentage of school leavers from (a) mainstream schools; and (b) Jordanstown School with hearing loss/deafness attending schools here who achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A\*-C (including equivalents) in the years from 2007/08 to 2010/11:

**% school leavers with hearing loss/deafness who achieved at least five GCSEs at grades A\*-C (inc. equivalents)**

|                    | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 <sup>1</sup>        |
|--------------------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------------------|
| Mainstream schools | 42      | 50      | 49      | Not yet available           |
| Jordanstown School | 0       | 0       | 0       | No hearing impaired leavers |

1 School Leaver data for the 2010/11 academic year will be available by June 2012

**Source:** School Leavers Survey, Jordanstown School

**School Leavers: Hearing Loss/Deafness**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the total percentage of school leavers with hearing loss/deafness who achieved three or more A Levels, or equivalent, at grades A-E and who attended (a) a Hearing Impaired Unit; (b) Jordanstown School ; (c) The Mary Hare School, Berkshire; and (d) a mainstream school, broken down by sector. **(AQW 9878/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** While the Department collects data on the achievement of school leavers with hearing impairments who attended schools here, the data does not identify separately those who had attended a hearing impaired unit. It is important to note that Jordanstown School does not enter pupils for A Levels.

The table below provides information on the percentage of school leavers with hearing loss/deafness attending mainstream schools here who achieved three or more A Levels (including equivalents) in the years from 2007/08 to 2010/11:

| Year  | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 <sup>2</sup> |
|---|---------|---------|---------|----------------------|
| % school leavers with hearing loss/deafness attending schools here who achieved three or more A Levels (including equivalents) <sup>1</sup> | 25      | 36      | 35      | Not yet available    |

1 School Leaver data for the 2010/11 academic year will be available by June 2012

**Source:** School Leavers Survey

The Department does not hold information on the attainment of pupils from here who attend the Mary Hare School but I understand that the school publishes information on the examination performance of all its pupils in its prospectus.

**Schools: Ministerial Visits**

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of school visits he has made since coming into office, broken down by sector.

**(AQW 9886/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The numbers of schools I have visited since coming into office, broken down by sector are detailed below.

|                                     |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Primary Controlled                  | 4  |
| Primary Maintained                  | 17 |
| Primary Other Maintained            | 3  |
| Secondary Roman Catholic Maintained | 13 |
| Secondary Controlled                | 5  |
| Secondary (Grammar) Voluntary       | 5  |
| Secondary Controlled Integrated     | 3  |
| Special School Controlled           | 5  |
| Special School Maintained           | 1  |

**Schools: Promoting Healthy Eating**

**Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to promote healthy eating in schools.

**(AQW 9887/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** My Department recognises that a healthy, balanced diet is vital for children's growth and development, and for their long term health and well being. It has been working for some time to improve the quality of food in schools here and compulsory

nutritional standards for school lunches are now in place in all our schools. Standards for other food and drinks provided in schools (breakfast clubs, tuck shops, vending machines etc) have also been drawn up and schools are expected to adhere to them. They specify that items such as crisps, sweets and fizzy drinks should not be provided in school.

The revised curriculum also includes a Personal Development and Mutual Understanding strand for primary pupils and a Learning for Life and Work strand for postprimary pupils which allow pupils to explore issues such as the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity, the consequences of poor dietary choices, ways of achieving a healthy diet, the influences on their physical and emotional health and ways of developing their self-esteem.

In addition, it is a requirement of the revised curriculum for all children to undertake Home Economics at Key Stage 3. This provides opportunities for young people to develop their understanding of a healthy diet and the hygienic and healthy use of foods in the preparation of meals.

My Department is currently working with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to finalise a joint Food in Schools policy which advocates a whole school approach to all food and drinks provided in schools and that all children should develop the knowledge and skills necessary to make healthy food choices now and in later life.

### **Dunmurry High School: Proposed Closure**

**Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed closure of Dunmurry High School.  
**(AQW 9889/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The development proposal for the closure of Dunmurry High School was published by the South Eastern Education & Library Board on 13 December 2011 and the statutory 2 month consultation period ended on 13 February 2012.

Following the consultation period my officials collate responses and relevant information to inform my decision on a proposal. My aim is to make a decision within six weeks of the end of the consultation period. Nevertheless, given the significance of such decisions, particularly where, as for Dunmurry, they involve possible closure of a school, I will ensure that I take sufficient time to give the proposal the fullest consideration.

However, I do understand the need for certainty on the part of all those involved with the school and I will ensure that there is no delay in making my decision.

### **Secondary School Provision: South Belfast**

**Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has for secondary school provision in the South Belfast constituency in the next five years.  
**(AQW 9892/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The management of the schools' estate is the responsibility of the relevant school managing authorities in the first instance.

I have commissioned the Education and Library Boards, working with CCMS and the other sectors, to undertake an Area Planning process which will result in a planned network of viable and sustainable schools to meet the needs of children and young people in an area. The initial Area Plans for the post-primary sector, which will include proposals for post-primary provision in the South Belfast area, are to be submitted to my Department by the end of March 2012.

Until the out workings of the Area Planning process have been determined and agreed, I cannot confirm how this will impact on future post-primary provision in the South Belfast area.

### **Quangos**

**Mr Weir** asked Minister of Education to detail (i) the quangos to which his Department makes appointments; (ii) how many members are appointed; and (iii) the remuneration paid to (a) the Chair; and (b) other members.  
**(AQW 9895/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The information requested is published in the Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Reports, which are available on the OFMDFM web-site. They can be accessed via the following link: <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/making-government-work/public-appointments/public-appointments-annual-reports.htm>

The most recent report covers the period 2010/11 and is also available from the Assembly Library.

Please note that, since the publication of the 2010/11 report, responsibility for the NI Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal transferred to the Department of Justice.

### **Cross-sectoral Education**

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education whether it is his intention to include a provision to enable new models of cross-sectoral education to be developed within the Bill to establish the Education and Skills Authority.  
**(AQW 9956/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Existing legislation already provides scope for a range of approaches to sharing, including: integrated schools; joint-faith schools; area learning communities; and shared campus approaches such as the Lisanelly project.

I will shortly be establishing a ministerial advisory group on the promotion of sharing. I will consider the group's recommendations before deciding whether there is a need for legislative change.

### **Youth Policy: Priorities**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Education (i) for an update on the Priorities for Youth Policy; (ii) to detail all meetings where the policy has been discussed; (iii) what actions were taken after the meetings, (iv) a timescale for the completion of the policy; and (v) what strategy is in place to guide youth services.

**(AQW 9967/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:**

- (i) The draft policy is close to completion and will be published for public consultation in the near future.
- (ii) There have been a number of meetings where the policy has been discussed. The Department carried out extensive pre-consultation with young people, youth workers, volunteers and youth service managers. The draft policy has also been discussed as a formal agenda item, and on an ad-hoc basis, during a number of other meetings held during the policy pre-consultation phase. These discussions mainly involved youth organisational representatives providing specific views or seeking updates on the development of the policy.

In addition, a stakeholder group was established specifically to assist DE in the development of the draft policy and to enable officials to draw on the experience and involvement of the statutory and voluntary youth sector. This group has met on 7 occasions since April 2010 and will continue to meet until the policy is published in its final form.

- (iii) The outcomes of the discussions have had a significant influence on, and informed the development of, the draft policy document.
- (iv) The draft policy will be finalised as soon as possible following, and subject to the outcome of, the public consultation.
- (v) The sector continues to be guided by the Strategy for the Delivery of Youth Work 2005 – 2008 and the Department's priorities for education.

### **CPR Training: DE Staff**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Education what strategy is in place to train departmental staff in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation. **(AQW 9969/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** My Department ensures that a sufficient number of our staff complete a Health & Safety Executive approved '3 day First Aid at Work' training course. On completion of this training, successful candidates will be able to administer Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

### **Area-based Planning: Timescales**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Education whether he has directed his Department to expedite Area Planning in (i) any specific Education and Library Board; or (ii) within a specific area of any Education and Library Board.

**(AQW 10039/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** I have not directed my Department to expedite Area Planning in any specific Education and Library Board or within a specific area of any Education and Library Board.

I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards, working closely with CCMS and engaging with the other sectors, to undertake collective strategic planning of education provision on an area basis. The Terms of Reference and Guidance for the Area Planning process have been published on my Department's website (at <http://www.deni.gov.uk/area-planning-terms-of-reference.htm> and [http://www.deni.gov.uk/area\\_planning\\_guidance\\_-\\_issued\\_14\\_february\\_2012.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/area_planning_guidance_-_issued_14_february_2012.pdf) respectively).

## **Department for Employment and Learning**

### **Unemployment: Craigavon**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 7077/11-15, to outline the nature of the work that the 1718 unemployed people have been helped to attain; and for a breakdown of the age and gender of the participants in the Steps to Work programme.

**(AQW 9557/11-15)**

**Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):** The Department does not track the nature of the work that unemployed clients attain.

A breakdown by age and gender of those who started on the Steps to Work programme in the Craigavon Local Government District from 1 April 2011 to 30 November 2011 is as follows:



**Steps to Work starts in Craigavon Local Government District (LGD) (April to November 2011) (1) (2)**

|              | Total      | Participants Gender |            |            | Participants Age <sup>(3)</sup> |                       |                      |
|--------------|------------|---------------------|------------|------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
|              |            | Male                | Female     | % Male     | Less than 25 years of age       | 25 to 49 years of age | Over 50 years of age |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>711</b> | <b>502</b>          | <b>209</b> | <b>71%</b> | <b>332</b>                      | <b>313</b>            | <b>66</b>            |

**Notes:**

- (1) Includes those who have received an invitation but have not yet attended their first interview.
- (2) Individuals were attributed to Local Government District on the basis of their postcode at date of data extraction from Client Management System (CMS). Clients with an incomplete postcode are recorded as 'Not Known'.
- (3) Participants age at start of Steps to Work episode.

**St Mary's University College: Protected Status**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why St Mary's University College, Belfast is afforded protected status from any proposed merger.

**(AQW 9638/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The second stage of the study of the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland will examine the options for a more shared and integrated system for the delivery and funding of teacher education. I have not announced nor referred to any form of protected status for any higher education institution.

**Quangos**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the quangos to which his Department makes appointments; (ii) how many members are appointed; and (iii) the remuneration paid to (a) the Chair; and (b) other members.

**(AQW 9763/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** Full information about public appointments made by the Department for Employment and Learning is set out in the "Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report", published by OFMDFM. The most recent report covers the period 2010/11 and is available from the OFMDFM website or from the Assembly library (Reference number R351.41609 NOR).

**Training for Success: Contracts**

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the current position of the Training for Success contracts that are due to expire at the end of March 2012.

**(AQW 9987/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** To ensure that training provision under Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI continues to be in place, my Department has offered existing training suppliers an extension to their current contract for a short period after 31 March 2012.

Thereafter, it is envisaged that my Department, via the Central Procurement Directorate, will be in a position to issue Intention to Award letters in respect of the new training provision. However, I must emphasise that this proposed approach and way forward is subject to an on-going legal challenge.

**Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment****Debt Advice Service: Tender Process**

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why there has been a delay in issuing a tender for Debt Advice 2012/15, initially due in November; and when the tender will be issued.

**(AQW 9364/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):** Since October 2011 officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment have worked with the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) to establish a public procurement competition for the provision of an integrated debt advice service.

CPD worked with DETI to review the lessons learned from earlier debt advice competitions and to ensure that the requirements and documentation for the new competition took account of any issues that were raised previously. In addition CPD asked the Departmental Solicitor's Office to review the final version of the documents. This process involved extensive consultation and extended the time taken to finalise this competition.

The Central Procurement Directorate finalised the documentation for the integrated debt advice service competition and issued these via eSourcingNI on 16 March 2012. The new service should be operational with effect from 1 July 2012.

In the meantime, the existing debt advice contracts delivered by A4e, Advice NI and the Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux have all been extended until 30 June 2012.

### Jobs: Creation

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) the number of jobs created or promoted by her Department or its arm's-length bodies; (ii) the number of jobs lost; and (iii) the net figure between both.

**(AQW 9413/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI is the agency through which the Department of Enterprise Trade & Investment (DETI) provides funding to grow the private sector in Northern Ireland.

Invest NI's focus is to increase business productivity, the means by which wealth can be created for the benefit of the whole community. It does this by supporting projects that aim to create jobs, an aspect of the agency's work that is becoming increasingly important given the need to increase employment levels following the impact of the downturn, and those that promote innovation and capability development. Although not directly related to job creation, innovation and capability development activities are designed to increase business competitiveness which generates growth, leading eventually to increased employment opportunities.

Table 1 below shows the number of jobs promoted by Invest NI in each of the 5 years between 1st April 2006 and 31st March 2011.

**Table 1: Invest NI Jobs Promoted (2006-07 to 2010-11)**

| Financial Year | Jobs Promoted |
|----------------|---------------|
| 2006-07        | 5,343         |
| 2007-08        | 4,552         |
| 2008-09        | 5,293         |
| 2009-10        | 4,113         |
| 2010-11        | 5,312         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>24,612</b> |

#### Notes:

New Jobs represent the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.

Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

In addition, Invest NI supported over 8,500 jobs through the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP), delivered in partnership with Enterprise NI. These jobs are detailed in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Invest NI Jobs Supported through EDP (2006-07 to 2010-11)**

| Financial Year | Jobs Promoted |
|----------------|---------------|
| 2006-07        | 1,806         |
| 2007-08        | 2,058         |
| 2008-09        | 1,431         |
| 2009-10        | 1,321         |
| 2010-11        | 1,888         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>8,504</b>  |

#### Notes:

Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

These figures are based on an estimate of jobs created by an individual EDP offer. This estimation process is derived from an independent evaluation of the programme.

and (iii)

The number of jobs lost and the net change in employment in assisted clients is not available at present. Invest NI is currently developing its information systems to enable this data to be collated; and it is also working with external researchers to consider the feasibility of measuring these aspects of employment change using information from business survey data.

### **Aviation: International Flights**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many international flights leave each week from (i) Belfast International Airport; (ii) the George Best Belfast City Airport; and (iii) the City of Derry Airport.

**(AQW 9493/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI) does not collect information in respect of the international flights which operate from Northern Ireland's three main airports. However, DETI understands that international flights proposed for Summer 2012 are as follows:

- 117 international flights (operated by easyjet, Aer Lingus, Jet 2 and Continental Airlines) will depart Belfast International Airport per week;
- 20 international flights (operated by bmibaby) will depart George Best Belfast City Airport per week; and
- 5 international flights (operated by Ryanair) will depart the City of Derry Airport per week.

Information is not available in respect of holiday charter flights.

### **Aviation: International Routes**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many international routes are available each week from (i) Belfast International Airport; (ii) the George Best Belfast City Airport; and (iii) the City of Derry Airport.

**(AQW 9494/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI) does not collect information in respect of the international routes available from Northern Ireland's three main airports. However, DETI understands that international routes proposed for Summer 2012 are as follows:

- 18 international routes to destinations in 9 countries will be available each week from Belfast International Airport;
- 7 international routes to destinations in 3 countries will be available each week from George Best Belfast City Airport; and
- 3 international routes to destinations in 2 countries will be available each week from the City of Derry Airport.

Information is not available in respect of holiday charter flights.

### **Inward Investors: Visits to Northern Ireland**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many visits has InvestNI facilitated for Foreign Directors, in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 9513/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** In the last three years Invest NI has arranged 388 visits by potential inward investors. These visits are broken down as follows:

- 146 in 2008-09,
- 129 in 2009-10; and
- 113 in 2010-11.

In order to report on visit numbers Invest NI records the company name, where they visit and other relevant information, which does not include the visitors' position within the company; therefore, we cannot report on the number of 'Foreign Directors' that have undertaken visits.

### **Land Bank: Upper Bann**

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 7079/11-15, how she is promoting the development of the remaining available land in the Land Bank.

**(AQW 9515/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The remaining available land referred to in AQW 7079/11-15, as with all Invest NI owned property, is actively marketed to foreign and indigenous investors through the agency's NIBusinessInfo.co.uk website. This also identifies private sector provision.

Invest NI undertakes bespoke property searches for companies to try and identify suitable property solutions. These searches provide details of available property that meets the requirements of the inquiring business.

When foreign investors visit Northern Ireland, or indigenous businesses are progressing their property needs, the agency works closely with companies to arrange a visit programme to see, at first hand, a range of solutions to meet their specific business needs and any other particular requirements they might have.

From 2008/09 to 2010/11 there have been seven inward investor visits to the Upper Bann Parliamentary Constituency Area. Invest NI cannot keep accurate records of the number of local company visits as these businesses often carry out their own visits independent of the agency.

Whilst Invest NI does offer guidance, it must be stressed that it is the potential investor's decision to make the final selection of those locations on its visit programme itinerary. This may be based upon a number of factors, some of which are outside Invest NI's immediate control, including perceived availability of skills and workforce, transport links, availability of suitable property and the presence of existing sectoral clusters within Northern Ireland. Investors may choose to expand at locations where they have a pre-existing presence.

It is also important to recognise, that the final decision on location rests solely with the investor.

### Football: Milk Cup

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 882/11-15, to detail the results of the independent research survey on visitor numbers and the economic impact of the Milk Cup tournament; and how much public sector funding the commerciality strategy identified for the tournament.

**(AQW 9545/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The results of the independent evaluation commissioned by Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) have not yet been finalised.

### Invest NI: Global Offices

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the location of each InvestNI office around the world; (ii) the number of staff employed in each office; (iii) the rental costs of each office; (iv) the employment costs associated with each office or location; and (v) the total annual running cost of each office.

**(AQW 9552/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI has a network of overseas representation focused on supporting Northern Ireland businesses to grow and compete internationally and attracting new investment to Northern Ireland.

The following table lists all locations where Invest NI has an ongoing presence in the market. It indicates whether the office is leased by Invest NI and also provides, where appropriate, the number of representatives, rental costs, and total annual running costs including rates, telecoms and utilities etc. The total associated employment costs have been detailed separately below.

| Location   | Number of representatives | Rental costs (£000's) | Total annual running costs (£000's) |
|------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Boston     | 10                        | 115,471               | 188,558                             |
| San Jose   | 9                         | 30,270                | 71,237                              |
| New York   | 3                         | 47,461                | 113,513                             |
| Chicago    | 1                         | -                     | -                                   |
| Toronto    | 1                         | -                     | 35,305                              |
| London     | 8                         | 96,790                | 122,790                             |
| Dublin     | 4                         | 25,943                | 56,000                              |
| Brussels   | 2                         | 23,282                | 29,282                              |
| Dusseldorf | 3                         | 16,193                | 32,513                              |
| Mumbai     | 4                         | 48,000                | 36,389                              |
| Bangalore  | 1                         | 12,000                | -                                   |
| Jeddah     | 1                         | 12,000                | 12,000                              |
| Dubai      | 2                         | 36,000                | 69,000                              |
| Tokyo      | 1                         | -                     | -                                   |
| Shanghai   | 3                         | -                     | 206,496                             |
| Taipei     | 1                         | -                     | -                                   |

**Notes:**

- 1 Rental costs are based on current annual cost of lease agreements in Invest NI's name, with the exception of Mumbai, Bangalore and Jeddah. These offices are co-located with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and are based on a fixed cost per head. The rental costs detailed above for these offices are based on current headcount.
- 2 Invest NI engages contractors in Tokyo, Toronto, Shanghai and Tapei to provide representative services including provision of personnel and office accommodation. It is not possible to split the costs so the total annual amount is included in the table above under "Total Annual Running Costs".
- 3 Total annual running costs are based on actual and projected spend for the current financial year, with the exception of the Tokyo, Toronto, Shanghai and Tapei offices. As per note 2, the total annual running costs are based on the annual service provider fee.
- 4 Total annual running costs are also inclusive of rental costs as detailed in the table above.
- 5 The Taipei office is funded from the Shanghai office and it is not possible to split out costs.
- 6 All costs are calculated using exchange rates at 21 March 2012 (source: Oanda currency converter website).
- 7 Bangalore running costs are paid from Mumbai office and it is not possible to split out costs.

For data protection reasons we cannot disclose employment costs on a per office basis (as there are a number of offices with only one staff member). The total employment costs for the current level of overseas representation is £2,698,728 per annum. This does not include the cost of personnel provided by contractors in the Tokyo, Toronto, Shanghai and Tapei offices.

In addition to the above list, Invest NI has in-market advisors in Moscow, Johannesburg, Sao Paulo, Mumbai, The Nordics, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania and Poland. However, these advisors are contracted on a call-off basis and there are no ongoing employment, rental or running costs. These advisors are not included in the table above.

**Offshore Renewable Energy Leasing Rounds**

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what role she, or her Department, has in the Offshore Renewable Energy Leasing Rounds and in setting the leasing tariffs.

**(AQW 9582/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Crown Estate announced the formal launch of the Leasing Round in December 2011 and, as the owner of the seabed, operates a competitive tendering process which it has developed for all UK Leasing Rounds. DETI is not involved in this process, nor is it involved in setting the leasing tariffs as this is a commercial matter between The Crown Estate and the bidders.

Prior to the launch of the Leasing Round, my Department's work on the development of the Offshore Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan and associated environmental studies has been an integral part of the development of this Round.

**Media Communications Protocols**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what media communications protocols exist between her Department and each of its arm's-length bodies; and to publish these protocols.

**(AQW 9588/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Department does not have a media communications protocol.

**Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: £50 Million Growth Loan Fund**

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the criteria that will be used to assess the applications for the £50 million loan fund for small and medium-sized enterprises as outlined in the Programme for Government.

**(AQW 9606/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The £50 million Growth Loan Fund will be managed on a fully commercial basis by an independent FSA approved Fund Manager. Applicants will need a business plan and up to date historical financial records to progress and will need to clearly demonstrate their ability to service the loan repayments.

Loans will be approved by the Fund Manager and terms will be negotiated with applicants on a case by case basis, taking account of risk levels involved.

The Fund Manager is managing a similar fund in the North East of England and will adopt similar processes here.

Companies must meet the normal criteria for European Union funding support which is that they are involved in Manufacturing or Tradable Services.

The Fund will not have any specific sector specific bias or focus. Under the EU Risk Capital guidelines the following are, however, specifically excluded:

- Coal
- Steel
- Shipbuilding and

- Enterprises in difficulty (within the meaning of the Community guidelines on State Aid for rescuing and restructuring firms in difficulty).

Key aspects of the Fund include:

- A £50m Fund – the focus of the fund will be the provision of unsecured debt.
- Target range: individual investments of between £50k-£500k
- Target businesses: SMEs operating in manufacturing and tradable services. The focus of the Fund will be on SMEs with growth prospects (typical funding for working capital, product development, sales & marketing development and capital investment). The majority of deals are expected to be with established companies with positive (export) trading history, which are seeking access to growth finance.
- Other funding sources will have been exhausted.
- Price will be targeted to reflect unsecured/cashflow lending risk.
- The Fund will be managed on a fully commercial basis by the Fund Manager.

### **Invest NI: Business Start-up Programme**

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the statement in the minutes of the InvestNI Top Management Team meeting on 5 October 2011 that the interim arrangements for the delivery of the Business Start Programme are working well.

**(AQW 9607/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** My assessment (and assumption) regarding this set of minutes is that they reflect an accurate record of Invest NI's Top Management Team Meeting of 5 October 2011.

### **Invest NI: Business Start-up Programme**

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 6708/11-15 which stated that Invest NI was not delivering a Business Start Programme, why the minutes of InvestNI's Top Management Team meeting on the 5 October 2011 states that the Managing Director of Clients reported that the interim arrangements for the delivery of the Business Start Programme were working well to date.

**(AQW 9608/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** As you are aware, Invest NI has had to put in place an interim service relating to business starts. This is as a result of ENI's legal action which prevents delivery of a business start programme.

The minutes of Invest NI's Top Management Team Meeting dated 5 October 2011 reflect the Invest NI view that arrangements for putting in place this interim service were progressing well.

### **Invest NI: Business Planning 1:1 Sessions**

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 6708/11-15 and given the reply stating that Invest NI is not providing mentoring hours, to explain what is meant by the phrase on the Go For It website that InvestNI will provide a business planning 1:1 session to review and finalise a business plan.

**(AQW 9609/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI does, as part of its core service, meet individuals and businesses on a 1:1 basis to provide advice on a range of issues including planning for their business.

Invest NI is not mentoring these individuals but is providing information, advice and signposting as appropriate to help the individual develop and complete their business plan.

### **Invest NI: Start-up Business Plans**

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 6708/11-15, why InvestNI does not keep a record of the number of business plans produced by start-up businesses.

**(AQW 9610/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Pursuant to AQW 6708/11-15, Invest NI has since been able to complete its records of the number of business plans produced by those who have enquired about starting a business since October 2011.

In the period October 2011 to February 2012 Invest NI responded to 3216 enquiries, held 88 business clinics, attended by 668 individuals and met another 444 individuals, which in turn resulted in 301 completed business plans.

### Invest NI: Business Start-up Programme

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether an interim Management Information System is in place to monitor activity on the current business start-up programme being offered by InvestNI.

**(AQW 9611/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI is not delivering a Business Start Programme. Invest NI does have a system in place to track the start up enquiries which Invest NI is responding to during the period of delay as a result of the legal challenge by Enterprise Northern Ireland.

### City of Culture 2013: NITB Financial Assistance

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an estimate of the financial assistance the NI Tourist Board will inject into a tourism marketing campaign for Derry City of Culture 2013.

**(AQW 9644/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has been supporting Derry City Council and ILEX in the run up to 2013, to ensure the City can develop an exciting and comprehensive events programme. NITB has committed £700,000 towards the UK City of Culture programme of events, subject to the necessary approval. In addition NITB's Tourism Events Fund 2013/14 will open Autumn 2012.

NITB will be working with the Londonderry Culture Company, to develop and align marketing campaign plans for 2013. Government approval of campaign expenditure 2012/13 and 2013/14 has not been secured. As a destination of significant importance to delivering the ni2012 programme, it is planned that Londonderry receives approximately 20% of NITB campaign marketing investment.

### Our Time, Our Place: Fermanagh

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the level of promotion that Co Fermanagh has received from the Tourist Board as part of the 'Our Time, Our Place' programme.

**(AQW 9647/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) remit is to promote the whole of Northern Ireland to both the domestic and Republic of Ireland markets with a view to increasing visitor numbers and spend. Each year, NITB undertakes a series of seasonal marketing campaigns in both markets. The huge variety of products, regions and events featured from throughout Northern Ireland are based on what motivates our key customer segments, which have been identified through substantial research.

These award winning campaigns have successfully driven both domestic and Republic of Ireland visitor numbers and spend over recent years, with both markets performing extremely well. Last year's campaigns cumulatively delivered a return on investment of £1:£18.

To date Co Fermanagh has featured extensively across the ni2012 campaign in various media channels across both the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland marketplace. These media channels have included TV, outdoor, local and national press, press releases and digital activation through www.ni2012.com and other NITB social media channels.

### Tourism Events Funding Programme 2011-12

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, for each district council area, the (i) events that received funding from the Events Funding Programme in 2011/12; (ii) level of funding each event received; (iii) number of visitors each event attracted; (iv) value of the domestic and international media coverage each event received; and (v) level of economic return each event generated.

**(AQW 9650/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:**

- (i) Events that received funding from the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's Tourism Events Funding Programme in 2011/12; and the
- (ii) Level of funding each event received is detailed below at Appendix 1.

NITB is still processing grant payments to applicants for the financial year 2011/12 so the final funding allocated cannot yet be confirmed. As part of the post event evaluation the following information is being collated:

- (iii) Number of visitors each event attracted: Applicants must provide a breakdown of actual spectator numbers, participant numbers and bed-nights compared to projected figures submitted at application stage;
- (iv) Value of the domestic and international media coverage each event received: Applicants must provide a breakdown of actual media coverage achieved compared to selected impacts at application stage; and
- (v) Level of economic return each event generated: The baseline economic return expected of events receiving funding is 5:1 for National Events and 8: 1 for International Events. The return on investment is calculated on the amount of funding NITB has contributed to an event and not calculated on the entire financial contributions received from other sources. For every £1 of NITB money invested in National Events - NITB would expect the event to generate an aimed £5 return on their investment. For every £1 of NITB money invested in International Events - NITB would expect the event to generate an aimed £8 return on their investment.

**Appendix 1**

| <b>Event:</b>   | <b>District Council Area</b> | <b>Funding</b> |
|---|------------------------------|----------------|
| The Decathlon Northern Ireland Triathlon Series               | All                          | £6,000.00      |
| Ulster International Rally 2011                               | Antrim                       | £5,000.00      |
| Great Game Fairs of Ireland                                   | Antrim<br>Ards               | £15,000.00     |
| Georgian Day, Armagh  | Armagh                       | £5,000.00      |
| William Kennedy Piping Festival                               | Armagh                       | £7,000.00      |
| Circuit of Ireland Rally 2011                                 | Armagh<br>Lisburn            | £20,000.00     |
| Open House Festival   | Belfast                      | £15,000.00     |
| Belfast Mela  | Belfast                      | £18,000.00     |
| Belfast Children's Festival 2012                              | Belfast                      | £8,000.00      |
| Out to Lunch Arts Festival                                    | Belfast                      | £8,000.00      |
| Festival of Fools 2011  | Belfast                      | £20,000.00     |
| Feile an Earraigh 2012  | Belfast                      | £18,000.00     |
| Belfast Book Festival   | Belfast                      | £20,000.00     |
| CineMagic   | Belfast                      | £10,000.00     |
| The 'Sizzle' Summer Barbecue                                  | Belfast                      | £10,000.00     |
| The Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival                           | Belfast                      | £10,000.00     |
| Ulster Festival of Art and Design                             | Belfast                      | £3,000.00      |
| Culture Night Belfast   | Belfast                      | £8,000.00      |
| Oh Yeah- Legends & Contenders awards                          | Belfast                      | £16,924.00     |
| August Craft Month  | Belfast                      | £8,000.00      |
| Belfast Photo Festival  | Belfast                      | £5,000.00      |
| August Feile 2011   | Belfast                      | £70,000.00     |
| Titanic Shakedown   | Belfast                      | £25,000.00     |
| Ulster Bank Belfast Festival at Queen's                       | Belfast                      | £56,000.00     |
| British Transplant Games Belfast 2011                         | Belfast                      | £10,000.00     |
| European Pipe Band Championships and Piping is Class Festival | Belfast                      | £20,000.00     |
| Belsonic  | Belfast                      | £50,000.00     |
| Belfast Taste & Music Fest                                    | Belfast                      | £40,000.00     |
| Ultimate Strongman Giant Weekend                              | Belfast                      | £15,000.00     |
| NI International Airshow 2011                                 | Coleraine                    | £6,000.00      |
| Relentless International North West 200                       | Coleraine                    | £65,000.00     |
| Lap The Lough   | Craigavon                    | £6,000.00      |
| Banks of the Foyle Halloween Carnival                         | Londonderry                  | £10,000.00     |
| City of Derry Jazz and Big Band Festival                      | Londonderry                  | £30,000.00     |
| Willowstone Arts & Music Festival 2011                        | Down                         | £8,000.00      |



| <b>Event:</b>                          | <b>District Council Area</b> | <b>Funding</b> |
|--|------------------------------|----------------|
| Festival of Flight in One Cool Weekend | Down                         | £30,000.00     |
| Fermanagh Seaplane Festival 2011       | Fermanagh                    | £35,000.00     |
| Dalriada Festival                      | Larne                        | £35,000.00     |
| Garden Show Ireland                    | Lisburn                      | £20,000.00     |
| National Countrysports Fair            | Lisburn                      | £15,000.00     |
| 3 day Hot Air Balloon Festival         | Lisburn                      | £15,000.00     |
| Ulster Grand Prix "Bike Week"          | Lisburn                      | £53,000.00     |
| Glasgowbury Music Festival             | Magherafelt                  | £20,000.00     |
| Red Bull Pro Nationals                 | Magherafelt                  | £15,000.00     |
| Giant's Causeway Coast Sportive        | Moyle                        | £15,000.00     |
| Boccia World Cup                       | Newtownabbey                 | £10,000.00     |
| 20th Bluegrass Music Festival          | Omagh                        | £15,000.00     |
| Sense of the Sperrins                  | Omagh                        | £15,000.00     |

### **Tourism Events Funding Programme 2012-13**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, for each district council area, the (i) events that will receive funding under the Events Funding Programme for 2012/2013; (ii) level of funding each event received or will receive; (iii) number of visitors each event is likely to attract; (iv) value of the domestic and international media coverage each event is predicted to generate; and (v) level of economic return each event is predicted to generate.

**(AQW 9651/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has made offers totalling £1,309,500 to 51 events in 2012/13, 41 national events were awarded £754,500 and 10 international events where awarded £555,000.

The level of funding each event has been awarded is detailed below at Appendix 1.

As part of the post event evaluation the following information will be collated:

Applicants must provide a breakdown of actual spectator numbers, participant numbers and bed-nights compared to projected figures submitted at application stage.

Applicants must provide a breakdown of actual media coverage achieved compared to selected impacts at application stage.

The baseline economic return expected of events receiving funding is 5:1 for National Events and 8:1 for International Events. The return on investment is calculated on the amount of funding NITB has contributed to an event and not calculated on the entire financial contributions received from other sources.

#### **Appendix 1**

| <b>Event Name</b>  | <b>District Council Area</b>                | <b>Funding</b> |
|--|---|----------------|
| Great Game Fairs of Ireland - Inc the Irish Game Fair and the Ballywalter Game & Country Living Fair | Antrim                                      | £30,000.00     |
| Circuit of Ireland Rally 2012  | Armagh                                      | £70,000.00     |
| August Feile   | Belfast                                     | £90,000.00     |
| Titanic Lockdown Festival  | Belfast                                     | £25,000.00     |
| Northern Ireland Milk Cup International Youth Football Tournament                                    | Ballymoney, Ballymena, Limavady & Coleraine | £35,000.00     |
| Relentless International North West 200  | Coleraine                                   | £90,000.00     |
| Foyle Cup  | Londonderry                                 | £20,000.00     |
| Happy Days - Enniskillen International Beckett Festival 2012   | Fermanagh                                   | £90,000.00     |
| Dalriada Festival  | Larne                                       | £20,000.00     |

| <b>Event Name</b>  | <b>District Council Area</b> | <b>Funding</b> |
|--|------------------------------|----------------|
| The International Ulster Grand Prix  | Lisburn                      | £85,000.00     |
| North Atlantic Fiddle Convention (NAFCo) 2012  | Antrim                       | £15,000.00     |
| Armagh International Road Race   | Armagh                       | £10,000.00     |
| Saint Patrick's Festival, Armagh   | Armagh                       | £20,000.00     |
| Georgian Christmas, Armagh   | Armagh                       | £15,000.00     |
| Galgorm Castle Northern Ireland PGA EuroPro Open 2011  | Ballymena                    | £15,000.00     |
| The Coca Cola Cinemagic International Film and Television Festival for Young People                  | Belfast                      | £30,000.00     |
| The Out to Lunch Arts Festival   | Belfast                      | £15,000.00     |
| Belfast Mela 2012  | Belfast                      | £20,000.00     |
| Festival of Fools 2012   | Belfast                      | £20,000.00     |
| The Titanic Boys   | Belfast                      | £20,000.00     |
| Requiem for the Lost Souls of the Titanic - St Anne's Cathedral and St Peter's Cathedral, Falls Road | Belfast                      | £15,500.00     |
| Celtic Chrono  | Belfast                      | £10,000.00     |
| Open House Festival  | Belfast                      | £30,000.00     |
| Ulster Festival of Art and Design  | Belfast                      | £10,000.00     |
| One Cool Day   | Belfast                      | £20,000.00     |
| Feile an Earraigh 2013   | Belfast                      | £30,000.00     |
| The Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival  | Belfast                      | £25,000.00     |
| Summer Madness   | Belfast                      | £5,000.00      |
| The MAC's Inaugural Visual Art Exhibition  | Belfast                      | £20,000.00     |
| Belfast Children's Festival 2013   | Belfast                      | £10,000.00     |
| Culture Night Belfast 2012   | Belfast                      | £15,000.00     |
| Titanic - the Musical  | Belfast                      | £12,000.00     |
| Flame Festival, Welcoming the Olympic Torch  | Coleraine                    | £30,000.00     |
| NI International Airshow 2012  | Coleraine                    | £10,000.00     |
| Portrush Regatta   | Coleraine                    | £20,000.00     |
| Ulster Rally 2012  | Cookstown                    | £15,000.00     |
| Lap The Lough  | Craigavon                    | £15,000.00     |
| Clogher Valley Show 2012   | Dungannon                    | £10,000.00     |
| Titanic...Our Stories  | Dungannon/Magherafelt        | £20,000.00     |
| The Carnivale of Colours   | Londonderry                  | £10,000.00     |
| Maiden City Festival   | Londonderry                  | £15,000.00     |
| Banks of the Foyle Halloween Carnival 2012   | Londonderry                  | £20,000.00     |
| Garden Show Ireland  | Lisburn                      | £30,000.00     |
| Sunflowerfest  | Lisburn                      | £10,000.00     |
| Hillsborough International Oyster Festival   | Lisburn                      | £30,000.00     |

| Event Name  | District Council Area | Funding    |
|---|-----------------------|------------|
| Northern Ireland Countryside Festival                                 | Lisburn               | £30,000.00 |
| Festival of Speed Maze of Long Kesh                                   | Lisburn               | £22,000.00 |
| Glasgowbury Music Festival 2012                                       | Magherafelt           | £30,000.00 |
| The Race of Legends 2012  | Moyle                 | £25,000.00 |
| The 14th Annual International Guinness Blues On The Bay Festival 2012 | Newry And Mourne      | £15,000.00 |
| 21st Bluegrass Music Festival   | Omagh                 | £15,000.00 |

### Tourism Events Funding Programme 2012-13

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what alternative criteria have been considered for introduction for applications to the Events Funding Programme.

**(AQW 9652/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The next open call for applications to the Tourism Events Funding Programme is likely to occur in autumn 2012. Events taking place between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014 will be eligible to apply for funding, subject to necessary budget approval.

No decision has yet been taken regarding the criteria which will apply, however these will be aligned to identify tourism priorities in the draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020.

### Twelfth of July: DETI Funding

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the funding her Department has spent on promoting the Twelfth of July in each of the last five years; and from which budget was this funding sourced.

**(AQW 9653/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has not received any request for funding from the Orange Order or the Royal Black Preceptory in the last five years. The current Tourism Events Fund closed on the 7 October 2011 and NITB plans to open its 2013/14 Tourism Event Fund in autumn 2012.

For six years the NITB has worked closely with Orange Order in developing the tourism flagship programme, this has involved staff time but no direct funding.

### Invest NI: Business Start-up Programme

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what information is provided by the Interim Management System that is in place to monitor activity on the current InvestNI business start-up programme.

**(AQW 9662/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI is not delivering a Business Start Programme. Invest NI does have a system in place to track the progress of start up enquiries which Invest NI is responding to during the period of delay as a result of the legal challenge by Enterprise Northern Ireland.

The system provides number of enquiries, number of business clinics and attendees, number of meetings with individuals and number of business plans completed by individuals.

### Invest NI: Local Enterprise Agencies

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 6708/11-15, to outline the nature of InvestNI's engagement with stakeholders; and whether this engagement has been extended to the Local Enterprise Agency network.

**(AQW 9663/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI has an active and on-going relationship with DEL and its service providers, many of whom are Local Enterprise Agencies, in relation to the Self Employment strand of its Steps To Work programme. Participants on the Steps To Work programme are routinely referred to Invest NI for advice and support in relation to starting their businesses.

Invest NI also has an agreement with Princes Trust NI (PTNI) that all enquiries received from 18-24 years olds will be referred to the Trusts' Enterprise Programme through which they can receive additional support. Invest NI engages directly with these individuals through the Invest NI business clinics and 1:1 advisory sessions.

Invest NI is also referring individuals to the Local Enterprise Agencies where appropriate, particularly with reference to the Enterprise Northern Ireland Loan Fund.

### Allied Irish Bank/First Trust Bank: Job Losses

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on any discussions she has had with the management of Allied Irish Bank/First Trust Bank and the Irish Bank Officials Association regarding the recent announcement that 2,500 jobs are to be lost within the company.

**(AQW 9690/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** My Department recognises the importance of growing the financial sector in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the main Northern Ireland banks make an important contribution to financial sector employment here. I am therefore very concerned to learn of the recent announcements in relation to job losses in the banking sector, including the decision by Allied Irish Bank, the parent company of First Trust in Northern Ireland, to cut 2500 jobs across the company.

I fully recognise the challenges banks are facing as they seek to recapitalise and restructure and the implications this may have on local operations and staff. I will be meeting representatives from the Irish Bank Officials Association (IBOA) on 27 March to discuss these developments.

### GAA, Rugby and Football Bodies: Meetings

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the dates of any meetings she has held, or the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has held, with (a) the GAA; (b) Ulster Rugby or the Irish Rugby Football Union; and (c) the Irish Football Association; (ii) the reasons for any difference in the level of engagement; and (iii) what was discussed at each meeting.

**(AQW 9692/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The information requested for the period 1 January 2009 – 31 December 2009 is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB). The following information however is readily available:

- NITB held meetings with the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) on 8 March 2011, 22 July 2011 and 22 March 2012.
- NITB held meetings with Ulster Rugby/the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) on 10 January 2012 and 28 February 2012; and
- NITB held meetings with the Irish Football Association (IFA) on 12 April 2010, 18 November 2010 and 21 March 2012.

As part of the development of the ni2012 programme the main local sporting organisations have been identified as key stakeholders in delivering the core aims of the ni2012 campaign, that is, repositioning Northern Ireland as a positive place to work, live, invest, study and visit. NITB has been engaging with all key sporting organisations in 2011 and 2012 including the GAA, Ulster Rugby, The Irish Football Association and The European Golf Tour.

Discussions at each meeting has included:

- Opportunities for partnership in the ni2012 programme.
- Develop closer relationships and understand and develop opportunities for promoting Northern Ireland as a tourist destination through sport; and
- Driving an enhanced sense of civic pride across the population in line with a key ni2012 objective.

### Renewable Energy: Newbuild Financial Incentives

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what financial incentives are available to promote renewable energy in new builds, particularly in relation to solar panels and geothermal technology.

**(AQW 9758/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** My Department currently provides financial incentives for a range of renewable electricity technologies, through the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO), and intends to introduce incentives for renewable heating technologies through the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI).

Solar PV panels are incentivised by the NIRO which provides a revenue stream for the renewable electricity generated in the form of Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROCs) which can be sold to electricity suppliers.

It has been proposed to incentivise the uptake of solar thermal panels, and other renewable heating technologies, under a Northern Ireland RHI. Under these proposals the RHI would support non-domestic installations in the first instance with domestic installations being eligible at a later date; in the interim, capital grants in the form of Renewable Heat Premium Payments would be available to domestic consumers. Geothermal technologies would also be eligible for incentives under the RHI, with specific grant support available for domestic customers wishing to install ground source heat pumps.

Following the consultation, further analysis was undertaken and I plan to make an announcement shortly on the final design of the Northern Ireland RHI. Further information on these measures can be found at [www.energy.detini.gov.uk](http://www.energy.detini.gov.uk).

## Invest NI: Market Research

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether InvestNI commissioned IPSOS Mori to undertake market research into stakeholder perceptions of InvestNI in 2010/11; and if so, when the results of this research will be published. **(AQW 9772/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Aside from dealing with businesses and client companies, Invest NI also engages with a wide range of stakeholders including elected representatives, business organisations and the media, financial and economic institutions and seeks feedback on its performance, communication and engagement with them.

In February 2011, Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI) commissioned Ipsos MORI, an independent market research organisation, to conduct research and seek the views of a range of representatives from local business organisations, the media, financial and economic institutions and elected representatives.

Whilst the survey covered a broad range of stakeholders, with a diverse range of, sometimes competing, interests, it is encouraging that knowledge of Invest NI and its remit among its stakeholders is high and impressions of the organisation are generally positive. Opinions on Invest NI were considered to have improved over year prior to the report, despite the difficult economic climate.

Relationships with those stakeholders with whom Invest NI has the most engagement are clearly stronger than with the wider stakeholder group. This is not surprising and even inevitable, and I am aware that the Chief Executive and leadership team continually strive to improve relationships with the wider stakeholder group.

## Fuel Poverty: Social Tariff System

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what representations her Department has made to energy companies regarding the establishment of a social tariff for (i) older people; (ii) people classed as fuel poor; and (iii) any other group of people. **(AQW 9905/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** I am already on record as stating that the introduction of social tariffs would be extremely complex and unlikely to solve the hardships caused by fuel poverty. As such, I have made no representations to energy companies and have no plans to introduce social tariffs at this time.

## Quangos

**Mr Weir** asked Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the quangos to which her Department makes appointments; (ii) how many members are appointed; and (iii) the remuneration paid to (a) the Chair; and (b) other members. **(AQW 9996/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The information requested is set out in the, "Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report 2010-11", published by OFMDFM which lists all of my Department's non departmental public bodies, i.e. Invest NI, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Health & Safety Executive NI and the General Consumer Council NI.

The Annual Report is available from the Assembly Library under Reference number, R351.41609 NOR.

## Department of the Environment

### NIEA: Staff

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of staff currently employed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency; and (ii) how many have (a) been recruited; and (b) left the agency in the last 12 months. **(AQW 2496/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):** The number of staff working in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency at 1 October 2011 was 692. The Department is also seeking to fill 41 vacancies. In the past 12 months four staff have temporarily joined the Agency. During the same period 11 staff left the Agency.

### Tamboran Resources Ltd: Planning Permission

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has granted permissions for Tamboran to carry out work within, or in close proximity to, an Area of Special Scientific Interest; and if so, to detail any permissions granted. **(AQW 5644/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Planning Statistics Team has undertaken an electronic search for planning applications under the name of Tamboran. This returned no results. Planning permission has not been applied for under the name of Tamboran.

In addition, NIEA has advised that Tamboran has not sought permission to work within or in close proximity to any Areas of Special Scientific Interest. I will pursue this matter if further information is provided.

### Planning: Enforcement

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of the Environment how many people have been evicted from (i) caravans; (ii) mobile homes; and (iii) permanent homes as a result of planning enforcement action in each council area, in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 6336/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Department does not have the power to carry out evictions. However, where development has been carried out without the benefit of planning permission, the Department has a general discretion to take enforcement action when it regards it as expedient to do so, having regard to the provisions of the development plan and any other material considerations. Enforcement Action may seek the cessation of a use or the removal of structures.

### Planning: Enforcement in Bangor

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of the Environment how many businesses in the Bangor area have had enforcement action taken against them as a result of starting building work before planning permission was granted, in each of the last two financial years.

**(AQW 6611/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** It is important to note that Enforcement Action has a precise legal meaning in Article 67A (2) of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. For the purposes of the Order (a) the issue of an enforcement notice; or (b) the service of a breach of condition notice, constitutes taking enforcement action.

In the last two financial years, the Department has taken no enforcement action against any businesses in North Down.

### Vehicle Licensing: Untaxed Cars

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of the Environment how many people were detected for driving an untaxed motor vehicle in each of the last three years, broken down by council area.

**(AQW 6637/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Vehicle licensing is an excepted matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport. It is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) under an agreement between the Department of the Environment and the Department for Transport.

DVA receives reports of vehicles allegedly being used on the roads without valid tax discs, and these are checked manually against the vehicle register. The Agency is unable to provide a breakdown of these detections by district council area. However, the total number of reports received for each of the last three years was as follows.

| Year | Unlicensed Detection Reports |
|------|------------------------------|
| 2009 | 40,103                       |
| 2010 | 34,360                       |
| 2011 | 37,779                       |

This work is part of a wider enforcement effort in which the PSNI are responsible for the detection of uninsured vehicles and vehicles being used without the appropriate test certificate.

### Taxis: Driver Licences

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the requirements for a person wishing to operate as a taxi driver; (ii) whether any specific criminal offences lead to a statutory bar for taxi drivers; and (iii) what security checks are carried out, and how often the checks are reviewed once a licence has been granted.

**(AQW 6675/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:**

- (i) In determining applications for taxi driver licences, the law requires the Department to be satisfied that a prospective taxi driver is "a fit and proper person" to hold such a licence. There is no statutory definition of "a fit and proper person". Each individual's case is considered on its merits and the Department's objective is to seek to maintain a proper balance between the safety of the public and the need to allow for the rehabilitation of offenders.

Previous convictions, if any, provide an indication of an individual's propensity towards violence, dishonesty, or to other unacceptable conduct, and may also indicate their likely attitude towards the high level of responsibility placed upon, and expected of, a taxi driver. In assessing the merits of each individual's case, their convictions, if any, are taken at face value with the penalty imposed providing an indication as to the seriousness with which the Court viewed a particular offence.

For these reasons, the Department obtains details of applicants' criminal records via an enhanced disclosure procedure from ACCESS NI. These reveal not only details of all of an individual's convictions, both spent and unspent, but also details of any relevant 'non-conviction' information about him or her that the police are holding. In general, applicants are expected to have a clear record of at least three years for serious convictions and 12 months for more minor convictions. I have made clear to officials that non-conviction information must be material, reliable and certain before it can be relied upon in making judgments.

- (ii) At present, while there are no specific criminal offences which lead to a statutory bar for taxi drivers, those applicants with offences of a sexual nature are unlikely ever to be granted taxi driver licences. Where an application has not been granted, applicants have the statutory right of appeal to the Courts. However, I have asked officials to provide further advice on the issue of a bar on granting a license to those, e.g, on the sex offender register.
- (iii) Taxi licences last for 5-years, after which they must be renewed and fresh repute checks are required. In addition, as a condition of being licensed, taxi drivers must inform the Department of any convictions arising during the currency of the licence. The Department also receives details of convictions incurred by taxi drivers from the PSNI on a weekly basis, following successful prosecutions through the Courts and the Department can then take action, where appropriate, to suspend or revoke taxi driver licences.

### Listed Buildings: Repairs

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the rationale behind the Environment's Agency's policy of offering financial assistance to a maximum of only 75 percent of the professional fees incurred during a course of repairs to a listed building.

**(AQW 7520/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Historically, the rate of grant-aid for professional fees was lower, and matched that of the level of listed building grant-aid being offered. In the late 1980s, when the level of grant-aid being offered was reduced, the current rate of 75% was introduced. The rationale behind this policy was to encourage applicants to use professional advice to achieve better conservation schemes, along with a higher standard of workmanship. The current level of professional fees is one of the areas being considered in the ongoing review of listed building grant-aid; other areas include grant-aid provision and funding rates, specifically with regard to listed buildings at risk. This review will include a 12 week public consultation exercise - expected to start this July - with the finalised scheme in place by the start of 2013.

### Wildlife Liaison Officers: NIEA/PSNI

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment whether the new environmental crime partnership between the PSNI and the Environment Agency will include the recruitment of more Wildlife Liaison Officers within the PSNI,

**(AQW 7527/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The PSNI/NIEA partnership involves the two organisations working together to maximise the effective investigation of a wide range of environmental crime. At present PSNI and NIEA are running a pilot project in part of Northern Ireland and the results of this will inform both organisations about the best use of resources in the medium to long term. Neither organisation wishes to pre-judge the results of the pilot project.

### Listed Buildings: Unauthorised Work

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of the Environment how many times unauthorised work has been carried out on listed buildings in each of the last five years; and the number of prosecutions as a result.

**(AQW 7722/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Department's IT system was upgraded in March 2009 and only live case information as of 1 April 2009 was backdated into the upgraded system; hence information is only available from that date. The number of cases investigated in each of the last 3 business years categorised on the Department's IT system with a breach type of Works to Listed Buildings is set out in the table below.

| Business Year   | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | Total |
|---|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Number of Case with Breach type of Works to Listed Building | 37      | 36      | 26      | 99    |

Of the 99 cases investigated 62 cases have been closed and 37 remain under investigation. Details of Reasons for Closure are set out in the table below.

| Reason For Closure          | Number of Case Closed |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| No Breach                   | 20                    |
| No Expedient                | 19                    |
| Remedied                    | 15                    |
| Planning Permission Granted | 8                     |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>62</b>             |

The Department investigates all alleged breaches of planning control. It is important to note, however, that the vast majority of breaches of planning control are resolved informally through negotiation with the owner/occupier or through the submission and consideration of a retrospective planning application. Whilst no prosecutions have resulted from the above investigations, 20% of the 99 cases when investigated did not breach planning control; 15% were remedied and 8% received formal consent.

I believe that effective enforcement must be seen as a deterrent to individuals who flout planning legislation and I have sent out a strong message to my staff that robust enforcement is an essential element of a balanced planning system.

### Northern Ireland Executive Office in Brussels

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department will work alongside the four departmental staff recently appointed to the Northern Ireland Office in Brussels.

**(AQW 7748/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The four Desk Officer posts have been created to assist the NICS to progress the Executive's "Winning in Europe" strategy. The post-holders will operate directly for, and to the benefit of, the four Thematic Priority Groups under the auspices of the NICS Interdepartmental Barroso Taskforce Working Group.

The secondment will provide each Thematic Group with a dedicated, embedded resource to strengthen our EU engagement and maximise our access to European funding opportunities.

The Desk Officer in Brussels assigned to the Climate & Energy Thematic Group will report directly to DOE officials who will be responsible for setting the objectives and priorities for the work to be undertaken in agreement with the other members of the cross departmental Climate & Energy Thematic Group.

The Desk Officer will work to develop EU contacts, knowledge and skills in line with the priorities set by the Thematic Group and will be in regular contact with their line management within the Department. The principal aim will be to identify funding opportunities and facilitate the application process to maximise the potential for successful drawdown of EU funds for Northern Ireland. The record of our drawdown of European funding programmes, particularly FP7, is capable of major improvement.

### Listed Buildings: Differentiated Grant Aid Needs

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration his Department has given to the specific differentiated grant aid needs of those responsible for the maintenance of listed buildings which are (i) private homes; (ii) commercial premises; and (iii) public buildings.

**(AQW 7842/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The listed buildings grant-aid scheme - for the repair and maintenance of historic fabric - is targeted at such works to the listed building itself. The rate of grant-aid is standardised at 35%. This percentage reflects the up-front difference in cost between using modern materials and techniques as opposed to appropriate and approved conservation based materials and techniques. However, in taking account of the needs of some private owners, a higher level of grant-aid is available for those on certain qualifying benefits, and also to owners of thatched buildings, for repair work to thatch roofs. Thatched properties are recognised as the equivalent of a 'threatened species'. Large commercial organisations are ineligible for grant-aid, as are buildings in public (government) ownership, and I intend that other organisations with significant assets – such as the Harbour Commission and the universities – should also not be entitled to grant aid.

### Human Resources

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of the Environment how many staff are employed in his Department's Human Resources section.

**(AQW 7879/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** 43 staff are employed in the Department's Human Resources section. A breakdown is shown below.

| Grade               | Headcount | FTE     |
|---------------------|-----------|---------|
| Grade 5             | 1.00      | *0.75   |
| Grade 6             | 1.00      | *0.75   |
| Grade 7             | 2.00      | 2.00    |
| Deputy Principal    | 7.00      | 7.00    |
| Staff Officer       | 9.00      | *8.10   |
| Executive Officer 1 | 4.00      | 4.00    |
| Executive Officer 2 | 4.00      | **3.75  |
| Admin Officer       | 14.00     | **12.97 |



| Grade              | Headcount    | FTE          |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Personal Secretary | 1.00         | 1.00         |
| <b>Grand Total</b> | <b>43.00</b> | <b>40.32</b> |

\* Role also includes non-HR activities including security, accommodation and communications.

\*\* Includes part time workers.

### Buses: Accidents Involving Schoolchildren

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment since 2006 how many school children have been killed or seriously injured immediately before boarding or after alighting from a bus.

**(AQW 8138/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The table below gives the latest confirmed statistics for the years 2006 – 2010. The figures for 2011 will not be available until May/June 2012.

The figures provided include all those children aged 4-18 killed or seriously injured pedestrian casualties on a journey to/from school who were injured before boarding or after alighting from a bus.

| Year         | Killed   | Seriously Injured | Total     |
|--------------|----------|-------------------|-----------|
| 2006         | 1        | 4                 | 5         |
| 2007         | 0        | 2                 | 2         |
| 2008         | 0        | 4                 | 4         |
| 2009         | 0        | 8                 | 8         |
| 2010         | 0        | 5                 | 5         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>23</b>         | <b>24</b> |

PSNI Statistics Branch, Lisnasharragh, is the custodian of all source statistics on the number of people killed or injured on our roads. The exact information requested is not routinely available to the Department and would require a manual trawl of the records by PSNI to identify figures which fell within the parameters of the question. To establish the exact information requested may, in some circumstances, require a direct approach to the individual investigating officers. If a further breakdown of the figures presented is required a request should be sent to the Chief Constable.

### Runkerry Golf Resort: Planning Application

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the Runkerry Golf Resort planning application, whether sufficient safeguards will be put in place to ensure that the biodiversity of the landscape is protected.

**(AQW 8220/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** My decision to grant planning permission for the proposed Golf Resort at Runkerry is accompanied by rigorous environmental conditions which will mitigate the impacts of the development on the ecology and biodiversity within the site and the local area. I believe that these safeguards are sufficient to minimise the immediate impact of the development on the nature conservation interests within the site and over time restore and even enhance biodiversity, particularly within the sand dune habitat.

Notably, an Environmental and Habitat Management Plan must be submitted and agreed by my Department before any work on site begins. This plan will be monitored throughout the construction and operational phases of the development through the submission of regular reports. The Environmental and Habitat Management Plan will include a scheme for the application of herbicide, pesticide and fertilizer in order to protect sensitive species within the sand dunes and some priority plants may also have to be relocated.

Other conditions will require the developer to avoid the most sensitive areas within the sand dunes completely and restrict their construction activities to minimise the impact on badgers and nesting birds, and to limit the potential for sediment release into adjoining watercourses. Lighting within the site will also be strictly controlled to minimise the impact on bats which use the site for commuting and foraging.

## Historic Buildings: Tendering Process

**Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration his Department has given to any efficiencies that could be made to the Environment Agency tendering process in relation to historic buildings.

**(AQW 8260/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Most of NIEA's work in regard to historic buildings relates to their identification and recording as listed buildings; their management as such; to the support of actions by private owners, not least through offering advice and grant aid, and; through outreach.

NIEA has tendered contracts for the Second Survey, and is intending to commission a baseline condition survey this year. In the past elements of engineering, planning and architectural advice has also been commissioned.

Procurement work carried out by the Agency is subject to legislation, NICS procurement rules and is in keeping with DFP guidance. This means that the process undertaken must comply with standard advice which includes efficiencies. However, irrespective of that the Agency has also worked to introduce efficiencies, where possible, in regard to the work commissioned. For example, the Second Survey contract issued in 2010 followed tests in 2008 and 2009, and as a result is much more focused and 'efficient' than previous contracts for this project. Further detail on this is provided in the answer to AQW 8259/11-15.

In relation to LB grant aid, in general, NIEA does not procure the work. Procurement is organized by the individual applicants. However in relation to a very small number of schemes that are funded by multiple government departments, with a majority of funding from government and as a result which fall within Central Procurement Directorate Procurement Guidance Note 01/07 The Use Of Grant For Procurement, other government departments (or, exceptionally, NIEA may) have a role to play in following public procurement requirements).

Another area in which the NIEA: Built Heritage Directorate (BHD) procures work to historic buildings – and also through CPD - is in relation to Urgent Works notices (these are small in number). For speed, the necessary works are carried out under the Maintenance Term Contract (MTC) using the CPD appointed maintenance contractor. This contractor is appointed for a five year period, under government procurement guidelines for works not exceeding £400K.

Finally, NIEA also owns a few historic buildings. These tend to be located within country parks such as Scrabo Country Park (Scrabo Tower) or the Roe Valley Country Park (multiple historic buildings including various ones that are roofless or derelict). Work has been undertaken in the past year to the Roe Valley Power Station and Scrabo Tower was conserved a few years ago. Specialist conservation work on these properties can be undertaken by the Agencies specialist conservation workforce, (which includes stone masons etc and which maintain specialist conservation skills that are not readily available in the construction industry in general) however other works are tendered through CPD and in accordance with standard government practice. The existing rules and EU requirements ensure various efficiencies.

## Planning Policy Statement 6: Areas of Townscape Character

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to change the Areas of Townscape Character Planning Policy. **(AQW 8303/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The addendum to Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 6 'Areas of Townscape Character' sets out the planning policy which applies within Areas of Townscape Character (ATCs). Operational experience is that this policy is generally working effectively to maintain or enhance the distinctive character of these designated areas.

I can therefore advise that I have no plans to change the policy at this time.

## Planning: Enforcement Time Limits

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the new time limits introduced for enforcement actions; and how they will affect long-term cases.

**(AQW 8578/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:**

(i) new time limits introduced for enforcement action

The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 provides the legislative basis for the reform of the Northern Ireland planning system, including the transfer of the majority of planning functions to district councils. A key aim of the reform is to introduce a strengthened, balanced and simplified approach to planning enforcement.

The introduction of a standard 5 year time period and its introduction in advance of the transfer to councils are set out in sections 132 and 248 respectively. On the 1 December 2011 the single 5 year rule was brought in to provide a more efficient system of control, less confusion and greater clarity in dealing with breaches of planning control.

(ii) how they will affect long term cases

The new standard 5 year time limit rather than undermining the Department's enforcement activity actually extends the previous 4 year time period available to the DOE providing enforcement staff with an additional year for taking action against breaches of operational development such as unauthorised buildings, engineering and mining operations. The change of time limit for other breaches of planning control from 10 to 5 years will mean that action will be taken more quickly.

In anticipation of the new time period a review of enforcement cases was conducted which prioritised work on urgent cases which may have been close to gaining immunity under the 5 year limit. This work resulted in more than 40 notices being served for unauthorised waste and minerals cases and more than 70 enforcement notices issued from the local Area Offices over the period Sept – Nov 2011.

### Crossmaglen Republican Monument: Planning Application

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of the Environment when the Republican monument in Crossmaglen Square received planning permission.

**(AQW 8584/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** My officials have advised me that a planning application for a landscaping scheme in Crossmaglen square, including environmental improvements, was approved on 9 July 1985 (P/1985/0544). The approved drawing includes reference to an existing monument located at the north western part of the Square. The Department has no record of having received an application for the erection of the monument.

### Crossmaglen Republican Monument: Planning Application

**Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of the Environment whether a planning application for the Republican monument in Crossmaglen Square was submitted; and what was the outcome.

**(AQW 8640/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** My officials have advised me that a planning application for a landscaping scheme in Crossmaglen square, including environmental improvements, was approved on 9 July 1985 (P/1985/0544). The approved drawing includes reference to an existing monument located at the north western part of the Square. The Department has no record of having received an application for the erection of the monument.

### Planning Policy Statement 18: Community Benefits

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment to list the organisations or individuals who advocated the removal of references to community benefits from the draft PPS 18.

**(AQW 9297/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** In total, 90 separate consultation responses were received to draft PPS18. Of these, TCI Renewables, RES, Renewables UK (formerly BWEA), and Turley Associates while not opposed to the concept of community benefits, all sought the removal of such references within the context of the policy document. The Royal Town Planning Institute sought the delivery of community benefits through Article 40 agreements only.

In addition, Lisburn City Council, Carrickfergus Borough Council, SWAMP and NILGA (supported directly by Newry and Mourne and Coleraine District Councils) all expressed reservations about citing community benefits within the PPS.

### Planning Applications: Consultation Waiting Times

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average waiting time in each planning area in each of the last six years for a consultation on a planning application with (i) Roads Service; (ii) the Environment Agency; (iii) NI Water; (iv) the Environmental Health Department of Councils; and (v) Ofcom.

**(AQW 9409/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Tables 1-5 below show the average consultation response times by planning area for Roads Service, the Environment Agency, NI Water, Environmental Health and Ofcom in each of the last six years.

**Table 1: Roads Service Consultation – Average Response Time (Days) By Planning Area**

|                | 2006/07   | 2007/08   | 2008/09   | 2009/10   | 2010/11   | 2011/12   |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Belfast        | 12        | 23        | 35        | 41        | 34        | 24        |
| Northern       | 15        | 17        | 18        | 24        | 19        | 15        |
| South Antrim   | 11        | 19        | 25        | 26        | 27        | 20        |
| Southern       | 14        | 23        | 32        | 31        | 31        | 32        |
| HQ             | 18        | 28        | 40        | 48        | 46        | 22        |
| Western        | 10        | 14        | 18        | 21        | 19        | 15        |
| <b>Overall</b> | <b>13</b> | <b>19</b> | <b>26</b> | <b>29</b> | <b>27</b> | <b>22</b> |

**Source:** Planning

**Table 2: Environment Agency Consultation – Average Response Time (Days) By Planning Area**

|                | 2006/07   | 2007/08   | 2008/09   | 2009/10   | 2010/11   | 2011/12   |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Belfast        | 19        | 31        | 41        | 49        | 40        | 29        |
| Northern       | 25        | 36        | 39        | 38        | 32        | 27        |
| South Antrim   | 19        | 28        | 37        | 40        | 27        | 23        |
| Southern       | 19        | 30        | 34        | 33        | 28        | 26        |
| HQ             | 22        | 35        | 40        | 37        | 42        | 31        |
| Western        | 20        | 26        | 34        | 37        | 31        | 29        |
| <b>Overall</b> | <b>20</b> | <b>31</b> | <b>37</b> | <b>39</b> | <b>34</b> | <b>28</b> |

Source: Planning

**Table 3: NI Water – Average Response Time (Days) By Planning Area**

|                | 2006/07   | 2007/08   | 2008/09   | 2009/10   | 2010/11   | 2011/12   |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Belfast        | 13        | 17        | 31        | 20        | 19        | 21        |
| Northern       | 8         | 11        | 10        | 9         | 8         | 26        |
| South Antrim   | 8         | 10        | 16        | 9         | 14        | 23        |
| Southern       | 9         | 16        | 31        | 18        | 14        | 31        |
| HQ             | 14        | 28        | 32        | 27        | 35        | 33        |
| Western        | 9         | 14        | 18        | 15        | 13        | 28        |
| <b>Overall</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>23</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>27</b> |

Source: Planning

**Table 4: Environmental Health – Average Response Time (Days) By Planning Area**

|                | 2006/07   | 2007/08   | 2008/09   | 2009/10   | 2010/11   | 2011/12   |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Belfast        | 17        | 21        | 24        | 26        | 23        | 18        |
| Northern       | 13        | 19        | 28        | 29        | 26        | 27        |
| South Antrim   | 12        | 15        | 21        | 20        | 20        | 28        |
| Southern       | 19        | 33        | 31        | 36        | 39        | 26        |
| HQ             | 21        | 37        | 50        | 52        | 52        | 38        |
| Western        | 21        | 26        | 29        | 24        | 29        | 22        |
| <b>Overall</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>22</b> | <b>27</b> | <b>27</b> | <b>28</b> | <b>25</b> |

Source: Planning

**Table 5: Ofcom – Average Response Time (Days) By Planning Area**

|              | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Belfast      | 21      | 57      | 14      | NIL     | NIL     | 13      |
| Northern     | NIL     | NIL     | NIL     | 728     | 16      | 48      |
| South Antrim | NIL     | NIL     | 110     | 41      | 24      | 72      |
| Southern     | 35      | 28      | 25      | 38      | 37      | 37      |
| HQ           | 28      | 47      | 63      | 85      | 232     | 31      |
| Western      | 10      | 160     | 52      | 9       | 27      | 36      |

|                | 2006/07   | 2007/08   | 2008/09   | 2009/10   | 2010/11   | 2011/12   |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <b>Overall</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>26</b> | <b>29</b> | <b>29</b> | <b>33</b> | <b>26</b> |

**Source:** Planning

Notes: The year 2011/2012 in Tables 1-5 above provides data up to 13th March 2012. For some areas there were one or two consultations only, hence the large average number of days to respond (for example, the Northern area Ofcom consultations in 2009/10). The figures provided were taken from information on the Planning Portal and includes transit times where relevant.

The advice provided by a consultee is one of a number of factors to be considered in reaching a balanced decision in any planning application. It is recognised that the final determination in relation to a planning application rests with the Planning Authority who will consider all relevant material considerations.

### **Limerick Point, Cushendall: Coastline Survey**

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department will conduct a survey and produce a report on the coastline known as Limerick Point, Cushendall.

**(AQW 9427/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** My Department has no current plans to survey and produce a report on the coastline at Limerick Point. My Department will consider conducting a survey on a coastline area, if there are reasons of nature conservation or earth science so to do. I would welcome hearing from public representatives in this regard.

### **Layde Graveyard, Cushendall**

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department will undertake a review and report on the condition of the Layde Graveyard, Cushendall, including the car park.

**(AQW 9428/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Only the ruins of Layde Church itself is the responsibility of the Department, and it is looked after by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency Built Heritage Directorate, as a monument in State Care. The graveyard is in the ownership of Moyle District Council and the car park is in the ownership of the National Trust. Thus it would be more appropriate for those organisations, as owners, to review and report on the condition of the graveyard and car park.

### **Habitats Directive: Ministerial Meeting**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on his meeting with EU officials on the Habitats Directive, with particular reference to Strangford Lough.

**(AQW 9431/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I recently gave a full account to the Environment Committee, of my assessment on the position of DOE and DARD in relation to Strangford Lough following the Package Meeting held by the European Commission in January. At this briefing I indicated that the Commission was expected to renew its infringement action against the two Departments shortly. Officials advised the Committee on 15/3/12 that the EU had now written to confirm that the process of infraction was now commencing.

In the meantime Officials in the two Departments are considering additional measures to ensure that remaining Modiolus reefs are adequately protected.

### **Planning Application: Tesco Superstore at Castlereagh Road, Belfast**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the status of the planning process for the proposed Tesco supermarket on the Castlereagh Road, Belfast.

**(AQW 9519/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** As you may be aware there is a long and protracted planning history to this site, dating back to the 1990s.

My officials are currently dealing with the discharge of planning conditions relating to a planning permission, which was granted in 2010, for a Tesco superstore on the site. If these conditions are discharged, the applicant will be in a position to commence development. The permission remains valid until 2015.

### **Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside: Dr Tony Bazely**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment, given his position in Tamboran, why Tony Bazely was appointed to the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside; and whether he will reconsider this appointment.

**(AQW 9520/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I reappointed Dr Tony Bazely to the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside due to his experience as a geological surveyor. My decision also took account of Dr Bazely's performance and conduct during his first term of appointment. His advice for example, to the Department on the designation of ASSIs for their earth science interests has been valuable. I

believe that people should be judged and assessed in the context of all of their contributions and views. Given this I believe that Dr. Bazely has made many valuable contributions.

My officials have confirmed that any conflict or perceived conflict of interest for any members on the Council is, and would be, carefully managed. The declaration of potential conflicts of interest is a standing agenda item at the beginning of each CNCC meeting, and all conflicts of interest are managed appropriately by the Chair of the Council.

Any member of CNCC faced with a conflict of interest must acknowledge this interest when required and take no part in any of the discussions or ensuing decisions of the Council on the matter.

### **Driving Test: Importance of Cyclist Safety**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment what importance is given to cyclist safety in the driving test.  
(Aqw 9538/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** The theory and practical elements of the driving test in Northern Ireland are based on European legislation and are similar in design to the rest of the UK. The test is designed to assess drivers' knowledge, ability and skills to drive safely.

The theory section of the car test is a two-part computer based test designed to assess candidates' knowledge of driving theory, the rules of the road and best driving practice. The first section consists of 50 multiple choice questions, which cover a wide range of topic areas, one of which is vulnerable road users including cyclists. When preparing for the theory test it is recommended that candidates study the learning material available. All publications include information and guidance relating to cyclists.

The second part of the theory test is a screen based hazard perception test during which the candidate is shown a series of video clips and asked to identify hazards. The video clips used contain a number of cyclist related hazards. However, there is no guarantee each candidate will be shown a clip which features a cyclist but the random usage of clips means they must be prepared to identify all types of hazards including those involving cyclists. The demonstration clip used, prior to commencing the test, is specifically designed and features a cyclist as the identifiable developing hazard.

The practical driving test is developed to assess a candidate's practical skills and understanding of the Highway Code. Driving test routes are designed to take account of different types of road layout, junctions and static hazards such as traffic lights, pedestrian crossing etc. There is no guarantee that cyclists will be encountered during the test.

All practical driving tests take account of a candidate's ability to cope with on-road situations. If they encounter a cyclist during test, they are assessed on their ability to deal with the situation safely.

### **Vehicle Licensing: Sale of Cherished Number Plates**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment how much money his Department has generated through the sale of cherished number plates in each of last seven years.  
(Aqw 9553/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** The revenue generated through the sale of cherished number plates in each of the last seven years is detailed below. As vehicle licensing is an excepted matter, the revenue is remitted direct to the Department for Transport.

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Total Revenue</b> |
|-------------|----------------------|
| 2005        | £1,606,233.94        |
| 2006        | £2,200,390.58        |
| 2007        | £1,988,014.28        |
| 2008        | £1,084,976.14        |
| 2009        | £1,038,371.16        |
| 2010        | £1,051,082.78        |
| 2011        | £833,801.84          |

### **Councils: Items Valued at over £350,000 in Storage**

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment to list the items valued at over £350,000, including their individual value, that are held in storage by each district council.  
(Aqw 9556/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** Each council has reported that it does not hold in storage any item valued at over £350,000.

### Listed Buildings: Disabled Access

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment what financial assistance is available to owners of listed buildings or buildings of historical importance, which are used as business premises and open to the public, for adaptations for disabled access in line with EU regulations.

**(AQW 9591/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The department has authority under Article 106 of The Planning (NI) Order 1991 to provide grant-aid for the '... repair and maintenance of a listed building...' and therefore focuses on the repair of historic fabric. Adaptations for disabled access are not regarded as a 'repair', but as an alteration, and listed building grant-aid is not provided for assistance with such adaptations, for any type of listed building.

I understand that there is a reduced or zero rate of VAT for alterations to buildings for people with disabilities; the following link provides more detail, but it may only be applicable to private homes - <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/vat/sectors/builders/disabled.htm>

The NIEA conservation architects are available to all owners of listed buildings for advice and guidance, including adaptation proposals to provide accessibility to their properties.

### Cyclists: Road Accident Deaths

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment how many cyclists have been killed in road accidents in each of the last five years and what is this figure as a percentage of all road deaths.

**(AQW 9592/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** PSNI Statistics Branch, Lisnasharragh, are the custodians of all source statistics on the number of people killed or injured on our roads.

PSNI have provided the following information, which gives the latest confirmed statistics for the years 2007 – 2011.

|       | Pedal cyclists killed | All road users killed | Cyclist deaths as proportion of all road deaths |
|-------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| 2007  | 2                     | 113                   | 1.8%  |
| 2008  | 2                     | 107                   | 1.9%  |
| 2009  | 0                     | 115                   | 0.0%  |
| 2010  | 0                     | 55                    | 0.0%  |
| 2011* | 2                     | 59                    | 3.4%  |

\* Note: 2011 statistics are provisional and may be subject to minor amendment.

### High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment to provide an estimate of the number of applications under the High Hedges Act that might be lodged in its first year of operation.

**(AQW 9600/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** A scoping consultation carried out in 2005, identified that there could be a backlog of 800 hedge problem cases which would be required to be determined by the councils in the first 2-3 years that the legislation is in operation. These would be spread across Northern Ireland. However, it is hoped that the legislation coming into operation will encourage informal resolution of many of these potential complaints.

Once the backlog of complaints has been dealt with, it is anticipated that a much smaller number of new cases will arise each year.

### Taxis: Rural Impact of Taximeters

**Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of the Environment whether any research or rural proofing has been carried out on the potential impact of introducing a taxi metering system and the subsequent on rural fares.

**(AQW 9614/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** In developing the proposals for the level of maximum fare, consultants carried out a significant level of research in both rural and urban areas of Northern Ireland on the costs of providing a taxi service. Their report concluded that there was no significant difference in the costs of providing a taxi service between urban and rural areas and that it would be appropriate to set a single maximum fare across the whole of Northern Ireland. I wish to stress that it is a "maximum" fare not a minimum fare as some have wrongly suggested.

The Department recognises that current fare rates in rural areas can be significantly lower than in urban areas and the setting of a maximum fare will allow drivers to choose to continue to set the rates as they do currently. At present the regulated fare

for Belfast Public Hire licensed taxi drivers allows them to charge less than the metered fare either by agreeing a fare with a passenger in advance of the journey or by deciding on and providing for a regular discount which applies to all fares.

Prior to consulting on the Taxi Fare and Taximeter proposals, my Department researched the potential costs associated with the introduction of mandatory taximeters throughout Northern Ireland. A draft Regulatory Impact Assessment was completed and formed part of the consultation. The consultation on Taxi Fare and Taximeter regulations closed on 17 February and officials will now complete the Regulatory Impact Assessment taking into account any responses received to the consultation and further evidence of the impact of the proposals.

### Taxis: Contract Accounts

**Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of the Environment how contract accounts would function under a taxi metering system. (AQW 9616/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** The proposal is to introduce a maximum taxi fare across Northern Ireland to prevent overcharging. Contracts for which the cost of a journey would not exceed the maximum fare for that journey would be unaffected by the change. However, it would not be acceptable for the contract journey to be more expensive than the regulated fare.

The consultation on the Taxi Fare and Taximeter proposals closed on 17 February and once the responses have been fully analysed I will decide the way forward and will include the policy for contract accounts in my consideration.

### Taxis: Rural Impact of Taximeters

**Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether there are any plans to introduce a taxi metering system in rural areas; (ii) to provide an estimate of the costs of introducing a system; (iii) whether financial assistance would be offered to small businesses; and (iv) whether training would be provided for businesses on the use of the meters.

(AQW 9619/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:**

- (i) From November 2011 to 17 February 2012 the Department consulted on proposals to introduce a Northern Ireland wide maximum taxi fare and linked to this is a requirement to have all taxis fitted with taximeters regardless of whether they work in urban or rural areas.

The introduction of a regulated taxi fare would allow taxi drivers to cover their costs, including the cost of a taximeter, and protect customers from being overcharged for taxi journeys. Officials are currently analysing responses to the consultation and, based on this assessment, I will make my decision on the most appropriate means of bringing forward a regulated taxi fare to the benefit of taxi providers and users.

- (ii) It is estimated that a taximeter and receipt printer will cost between £450 and £600. Experience from other jurisdictions is that many drivers choose to hire the equipment.
- (iii) The Department is not able to offer direct financial assistance; however, the proposed maximum fare level has been calculated to allow the taxi driver to cover the costs of the taximeter and receipt printer.
- (iv) Taxi drivers will be able to choose the make and model of taximeter they use and the manufacturer or their agent will be able provide appropriate training on that particular machine.

### Taxis: Fixed Penalty Notices

**Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of the Environment how many fixed penalty tickets the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) issued to taxi drivers in the Fermanagh area in 2011; and what is the extent of the DVA's powers in relation to these cases.

(AQW 9621/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** The Road Traffic (NI) Order 2007 secured new powers to aid enforcement of driver and vehicle related offences through the issue of fixed penalty notices as an alternative to prosecution.

Graduated fixed penalties are issued by Driver & Vehicle Agency enforcement officers. Depending on the nature of the offence, a driver found to be non compliant with legislative requirements may be offered a fixed penalty in lieu of prosecution at court.

Since February 2011, a total of 74 taxis have been scrutinised in the Fermanagh area for compliance with regulatory requirements. In that period, the following sanctions have been imposed.

| Nature of Sanction                           | Number Issued | Amount of Penalty |
|--|---------------|-------------------|
| Non Endorsable FPN (£30)                     | 2             | £60               |
| Endorsable FPN (£60 + 3PP)                   | 1             | £60               |
| Endorsable FPN (£200 +3 PP)                  | 1             | £200              |
| Partial Test (Prohibition Acquittal £ 19.50) | 19            | £310.50           |
| Full Test (Prohibition Acquittal £138.50)    | 11            | £1523.50          |



| Nature of Sanction  | Number Issued | Amount of Penalty      |
|---------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| Prosecution Reports | 3             | Awaiting Court Outcome |

In February 2012, the range of taxi related offences for which fixed penalty notices can be issued by a vehicle examiner was further extended as part of phase 2 of the graduated fixed penalty and deposit scheme.

### Cycling Proficiency Scheme

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) what proportion of primary school children participated in the Cycling Proficiency Scheme in each of the last three years; (ii) what steps will be taken to increase participation; (iii) for his assessment of whether the cycling proficiency scheme is offered at too late a stage for children, particularly given the Programme for Government's goal to see 36 percent of all primary school children walking or cycling as their main mode of transport; (iv) for his assessment of whether the cycling proficiency scheme should include road training, given that it is included in the Sustrans Bike It Scheme; and (v) what steps are being taken to integrate the promotion of cycling through the school travel plans, the Cycling Proficiency Scheme and cycling safety.

**(AQW 9626/11-15)**

#### Mr Attwood:

- (i) The Cycling Proficiency Scheme (CPS) is offered to all of the 849 primary schools in Northern Ireland. CPS is aimed mostly at children in Primary 7, although some schools do offer CPS to Primary 6 and occasionally Primary 5 children. However, they must be over nine years of age before they are allowed to sit the final test. In the academic year 2008/2009 569 primary schools and 8851 pupils participated in the scheme. In 2009/2010 581 schools and 9447 pupils participated and in 2010/2011 it was 575 schools and 8670 pupils.
- (ii) Road Safety Education Officers (RSEOs) actively promote all aspects of road safety education through the schools system. The ideal would be to have all primary schools delivering CPS but, as road safety is not a compulsory part of the school curriculum, my Department cannot require this. However, RSEOs will continue to attempt to persuade all primary schools to accept CPS as part of their road safety education programme.
- (iii) CPS is aimed primarily at Primary 7 pupils. This is consistent with best practice guidelines as established by a working group including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA), the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Road Safety Officers and the Cyclists Touring Club (CTC). The guidelines state that a minimum age of nine years should be set for off-road cyclist training and a minimum age of ten years should be set for cyclist training courses that include an on-road training element. Below this age, children have difficulties in successfully coping with the twin tasks of managing a bicycle and negotiating traffic situations. Policy responsibility for encouraging cycling and modal shift rests with DRD and the DOE has no specific remit or statutory authority to promote or encourage the uptake of cycling. The DOE does have a statutory duty to promote road safety and one of the ways it does this is through the provision of CPS. It is solely concerned with the CPS as a road safety measure.
- (iv) The Sustrans Bike It scheme is a sustainable transport scheme with the principal aim of increasing the number of children who choose cycling as a means of travelling to and from school. CPS is purely a road safety scheme. CPS does have an on-road element to it. This is offered to every primary school, though many choose not to include the on-road cycling experience for safety and public liability reasons.

As already covered above at item (iii), policy responsibility for encouraging cycling and modal shift rests with DRD and the DOE has no specific remit or statutory authority to promote or encourage the uptake of cycling. It is worth noting however, that as cycling rates increase, so do fatalities and injuries to cyclists. This was a point made by the Prime Minister during a debate in the House of Commons on 22 February 2012, when he referred to a 7% increase in cyclists deaths over the previous year and stated 'Any one who has got on a bicycle, particularly in one of our busiest cities, knows that you are taking your life in your hands every day you do so'. As CPS is solely a road safety measure, there are no plans to integrate it with the promotion of cycling.

### Taxis: Operator Licences

**Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of the Environment whether a controller employed by a taxi firm requires an operator's licence.  
**(AQW 9629/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** From 1 September 2012 anyone operating a taxi service will require an operator licence. Taxi drivers must either have their own operator licence or be named on one as an affiliated driver. All taxi vehicles must also be registered on an operator licence. There is no requirement for managerial or administrative employees working for an operator to be named on that operator licence.

### Taxis: Driver Tests

**Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of the Environment why an individual no longer has to take a test to acquire a taxi licence.  
**(AQW 9630/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The taxi driver test was withdrawn in 1996 due to the similarities with the category B car driving test, with the aim of reintroducing the test in a more robust and appropriate format at a later date. The Taxis Act 2008 contains powers to develop such a test, and it is currently planned for re-introduction from September 2014.

## **Dog Control Orders: Right to Appeal**

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to prevent a large volume of complaints about the lack of rights to appeal Dog Control Orders, given that the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 has led to a large volume of complaints being made in England and Wales.

**(AQW 9664/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The right to appeal against a dog control order was not an issue raised by the vast majority of those who responded to the consultation exercise on the new regime under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. I note the apparent experience elsewhere but the Department has not received any notice that a large volume of complaints may arise following the introduction of dog control orders in Northern Ireland.

The Department is keen to provide a more streamlined system for dog control than that which currently exists under the dog byelaws regime. However, whilst the new system does not incorporate an appeal mechanism, it does require councils to consult with local residents on any proposal to make a dog control order. Departmental guidance on dog control orders prepared for district councils makes it clear that they must give due consideration to any representations they receive as a result of the consultation process and that failure to do so could make any subsequent dog control order vulnerable to challenge in the Courts.

## **Dog Control Orders: Overly Restrictive Approach**

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of the Environment what action he intends to take to address the actions of local councils that are implementing overly restrictive Dog Control Orders under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act ( Northern Ireland ) 2011.

**(AQW 9665/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Department has no evidence to suggest that councils will take an overly restrictive approach in implementing dog control orders.

District councils may make dog control orders, provided that they are satisfied that an order is justified, and they have followed the necessary procedures. The consultation process in the area where a proposed order is intended to be made will highlight any issues local residents, including dog owners, may have.

In comprehensive guidance for councils on dog control orders, the Department makes it clear that when deciding whether to make a dog control order, a council will need to balance the interests of those in charge of dogs against the interests of those affected by the activities of dogs. They will need to bear in mind the need for people, in particular children, to have access to dog-free areas and areas where dogs are kept under strict control, and the need for those in charge of dogs to have access to areas where they can exercise their dogs without undue restrictions. A failure to give due consideration to these factors could make any subsequent dog control order vulnerable to challenge in the Courts.

The Department's guidance also advises councils to bear in mind that the introduction of a dog control order may not always be the most appropriate course of action and that education also has an important part to play in promoting responsible dog ownership. The Department will wish to monitor the overall effectiveness of the new regime in due course.

## **Cycling Proficiency Scheme**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment how many schools currently operate the Cycling Proficiency Scheme.

**(AQW 9670/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Cycling Proficiency Scheme (CPS) is offered to all of the 849 primary schools in Northern Ireland. The majority of schools prefer to deliver the training in the final term, therefore no figures are available for the 2011 – 2012 academic year. However, the scheme is active in approximately 580 primary schools.

## **Cycling Proficiency Scheme**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment whether there are any plans to shift the focus of the Cycling Proficiency Scheme for pupils in P7 to pupils in P3 and P4.

**(AQW 9671/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Cycling Proficiency Scheme (CPS) is offered to all of the 849 primary schools in Northern Ireland and is aimed primarily at children in Primary 7, although some schools do offer CPS to Primary 6 and occasionally Primary 5 children. However, they must be over nine years of age before they are allowed to sit the final test.

This is consistent with best practice guidelines as established by a working group including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA), the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Road Safety Officers and the Cyclists Touring Club (CTC). The guidelines state that a minimum age of nine years should be set for off-road cyclist training and a minimum age of ten years should be set for cyclist training courses that include an on-road training element. Below this age, children have difficulties in successfully coping with the twin tasks of managing a bicycle and negotiating traffic situations.

In line with the group's guidelines, it would therefore not be appropriate to train children in Primary 3 and Primary 4.

## Animal Carcasses: Illegal Dumping

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment to what extent the illegal dumping of animal carcasses pollutes the environment and waterways; and whether he will engage with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to address this issue.

**(AQW 9755/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Primary responsibility for all animal-related issues rests with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, outside the Department of the Environment's remit. DOE therefore has no legislative remit to collate details of any reports it receives of the dumping of animal remains. Instead, these are passed to DARD colleagues for action. However, the level of reports received by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency would suggest illegal disposal of animal carcasses is infrequent. This limits the impact on the environment. However, clearly the potential for environmental damage is significant.

Whilst the Department of the Environment's legislation is limited in respect of animal remains, I would be happy to discuss the issue with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and offer her Department any assistance possible.

## Department of Finance and Personnel

### Benefits: Unemployment-related Claimants

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many of the current unemployment-related benefit claimants have cited their previous employment as self-employed.

**(AQW 9559/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):** Robust information on previous employment status is not available from either the Claimant Count datasets held by NISRA or the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the most recent quarter.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) does ask unemployed respondents if they claim unemployment related benefit and their employment status in their last job. However, the LFS sample size and design does not support the production of sufficiently reliable estimates from the most recent quarterly data given the small numbers recorded.

### Construction Projects: Publicly Funded

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, between 1 April 2011 and 13 March 2012, to detail (i) the publicly funded construction projects that were put out to tender to consultants or building and civil engineering contractors, and of these (a) the contracts that have been awarded; and (b) the accepted tender price of each contract awarded; and (ii) what publicly funded construction projects have been advertised inviting consultants or building and civil engineering contractors to submit expressions of interest, and of these (a) which consultants or building and civil engineering contractors have had tender documentation issued and returned; (b) when the tender documentation will be issued to the consultants or building and civil engineering contractors who are awaiting it; and (c) the estimated construction costs for each consultant or building and civil engineering contractor to date.

**(AQW 9598/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The information requested in relation to tender exercises for construction projects undertaken, or commenced, by my Department is listed in the table overleaf.

#### Publicly funded DFP construction projects tendered in 2011/12

| Project Name                                     | Contract Awarded | Accepted tender price |
|--|------------------|-----------------------|
| DARD Direct accommodation Atek Building, Armagh. | Yes              | £ 754,689. 68         |

#### Publicly funded DFP construction project tender opportunities advertised in 2011/12

| Project Name                                      | Estimated value | Contractors who received & returned tender documents  | Anticipated tender issue date |
|---|-----------------|---|-------------------------------|
| DARD Direct accommodation, Atek Building, Armagh. | £ 754,689       | Tracey Brothers Ltd,<br>Heron Brothers Ltd,<br>Mascott Construction Ltd,<br>Moss Construction NI Ltd,<br>Patton Group Ltd | Not applicable                |
| Replacement generator, Dundonald House.           | £ 250,000       | None*   | April 2012                    |

| Project Name                           | Estimated value | Contractors who received & returned tender documents | Anticipated tender issue date |
|--|-----------------|--|-------------------------------|
| DARD Direct accommodation Newtownards. | £ 760,000       | None*  | April 2012                    |
| DARD Direct accommodation Ballymena.   | £ 590,000       | None*  | May 2012                      |

\* Project is at prequalification questionnaire stage, so no tender documents have been issued.

### Rates: Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the average level of reduction as a result of the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme and what is this reduction as a percentage.

**(AQW 9599/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Small Business Rates Relief Scheme comprises of two elements. The main scheme for small commercial premises and an enhanced scheme for small post offices or premises which include a post office counter.

The current main scheme has two levels of rebate dependant on the net annual value (NAV) of the eligible property. From April 2012 a third level of rebate will be introduced. The table below details the percentage and estimated average discounts at each level for the 2011/12 rating year and the expected average discounts for the 2012/13 rating year including for those businesses who will qualify for the scheme for the first time.

| Rating Year<br>NAV     | 2011/12     |             | 2012/13 |             |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------|-------------|
|                        | £0 – £2,000 | 50%         | £313    | 50%         |
| £2,001 - £5,000        | 25%         | £443        | 25%     | £453        |
| £5,001 - £10,000       | N/A         | N/A         | 20%     | £740        |
| <b>Overall Average</b> |             | <b>£396</b> |         | <b>£525</b> |

The post office scheme consists of two levels of rebate. The table below sets out the percentage discount available at each level, the estimated average rebates received during the 2011/12 rating year and the expected average rebates for the 2012/13 rating year.

| Rating Year<br>NAV     | 2011/12     |              | 2012/13 |              |
|------------------------|-------------|--------------|---------|--------------|
|                        | £0 - £9,000 | 100%         | £1953   | 100%         |
| £9,001 - £12,000       | 50%         | £2965        | 50%     | £3033        |
| <b>Overall Average</b> |             | <b>£2075</b> |         | <b>£2122</b> |

Over the next three years under the main scheme (50% and 25% relief) an average of £1,259 and up to a maximum of £2,209 could be paid to eligible businesses. Those receiving relief under the extended main scheme (20% relief) could receive around £2,299 relief on average, and up to a maximum of around £3,534, over the three years through to 31 March 2015.

### Public Sector Employment: Debt

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the research published by the Money Advice Trust which shows that regions with high levels of public sector employment are likely to see a sharp increase in personal debt problems in 2012 due to budget cuts.

**(AQW 9633/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Clearly, depressed economic conditions and relatively high unemployment will have implications for indebtedness and the number of households experiencing debt problems. And in that regard, I welcome the report highlighting the benefits of seeking advice for those experiencing such difficulties.

I also fully recognise the challenge we face in the current tight fiscal environment and the importance of public sector employment in Northern Ireland. That is why I have taken steps to control the public sector pay bill – for example by implementing the two-year pay freeze and ending the bonus arrangements for senior civil servants – in order to protect public sector employment which the latest available statistics reveal only fell by 2.4 per cent over the last year compared to 4.3 per cent in the UK as a whole.

The Executive has made rebuilding and rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy its top priority in the Programme for Government and Economic Strategy. In the long term, increasing prosperity and living standards in Northern Ireland will be key in lifting people out of poverty and reducing the risk of debt problems.

### **Construction Contracts (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011**

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the commencement of the Construction Contracts (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland ) 2011; and which branch within his Department is responsible for this issue.  
**(AQW 9676/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** DFP is currently carrying out a public consultation on proposals to amend the Scheme for Construction Contracts in Northern Ireland Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 (known as 'the Scheme'). The closing date for responses is 2 May 2012. Before the Commencement Order bringing the Construction Contracts (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 into operation can be made, it is necessary to amend the Scheme to bring its provisions into line with the Act.

Central Procurement Directorate expects to report on the outcome of this consultation exercise by mid to late May. Dependent on the responses received and subject to Assembly business planning and the requirements of the DFP Committee, this may enable the amending subordinate legislation to be laid before the Assembly before the summer recess.

The branch responsible for the Amendment Act and the preparation of this subordinate legislation is within the Policy and Performance Division of the Central Procurement Directorate.

### **Rates: Unoccupied Non-domestic Properties**

**Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of non-domestic properties currently unoccupied in each constituency, broken down by classification; and (ii) how the figures compare with the figures three years ago.  
**(AQW 9723/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Information on the number of unoccupied non-domestic properties by constituency is not available as data is collated at District Council and Ward level only.

The following tables list the number of unoccupied non-domestic properties by District Council area and classification as at 31st March 2010 and 18th March 2012 (the earliest and latest dates for which comparable information is available).

#### **Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification**

| <b>District Council/Classification</b>        | <b>As at 31 March 2010</b> | <b>As at 18 March 2012</b> |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Antrim Total</b>                           | <b>375</b>                 | <b>392</b>                 |
| <b>Of which:</b>                              |                            |                            |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                | *                          | *                          |
| Car Parks                                     | *                          | *                          |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                   | *                          | *                          |
| Closed Hereditaments                          | 13                         | *                          |
| Commercial Unclassified                       | *                          | *                          |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard         | *                          | *                          |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens | *                          | *                          |
| Filling Stations                              | *                          | *                          |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes          | *                          | *                          |
| Land Available for Commercial Development     | *                          | *                          |
| Law and Order Establishments                  | *                          | *                          |
| Libraries etc                                 | *                          | *                          |
| Licensed Premises                             | *                          | *                          |
| Manufactories                                 | 20                         | 7                          |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties       | *                          | *                          |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                     | 6                          | 7                          |

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 63                  | 67                  |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                   | 7                   |
| Public Built Housing                             | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                      | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 64                  | 73                  |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                   | *                   |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 171                 | 154                 |
| Unclassified                                     | 7                   | 55                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification               | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Ards Total</b>                             | <b>542</b>          | <b>581</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                              |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                | *                   | *                   |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                   | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                          | 18                  | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                       | 14                  | 6                   |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard         | *                   | *                   |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens | *                   | *                   |
| Filling Stations                              | *                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes          | 8                   | 7                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development     | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Residential Development    | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                  | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                             | *                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                 | 46                  | 54                  |
| Markets, Marts                                | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Education, Cultural, Scientific | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                     | 6                   | 9                   |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)            | 9                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)     | 100                 | 98                  |
| Privately Built Housing                       | 8                   | 8                   |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                 | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                   | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc           | 119                 | 118                 |

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Sites and Yards                                  | 8                   | 9                   |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 166                 | 192                 |
| Unclassified                                     | 14                  | 64                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Armagh Total</b>                              | <b>541</b>          | <b>529</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                 |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                   | *                   | *                   |
| Car Parks  | *                   | *                   |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                      | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                             | 16                  | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                          | *                   | *                   |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard            | *                   | *                   |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens    | *                   | *                   |
| Filling Stations                                 | *                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                          | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Residential Development       | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                     | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Betting Shops                           | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                                | 6                   | 8                   |
| Manufactories                                    | 25                  | 15                  |
| Miscellaneous Education, Cultural, Scientific    | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties          | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | 14                  | 9                   |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | 9                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 116                 | 135                 |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                   | *                   |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                    | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                      | 11                  | 9                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 129                 | 127                 |
| Sites and Yards                                  | 6                   | 6                   |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 151                 | 158                 |

| District Council/Classification | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Unclassified                    | 14                  | 42                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Ballymena Total</b>                           | <b>441</b>          | <b>480</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                 |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                   | *                   | *                   |
| Car Parks  | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                             | 6                   | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                          | 8                   | *                   |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard            | *                   | *                   |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens    | *                   | *                   |
| Filling Stations                                 | *                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes             | *                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                          | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                     | *                   | *                   |
| Libraries etc                                    | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                                | 6                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                    | 13                  | 13                  |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 87                  | 83                  |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                   | 7                   |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                    | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 128                 | *                   |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                   | 133                 |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 157                 | *                   |
| Unclassified                                     | *                   | *                   |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Ballymoney Total</b>         | <b>181</b>          | <b>202</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                |                     |                     |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc     | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments            | *                   | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified         | *                   | *                   |



| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Filling Stations                                 | *                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                          | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                     | *                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                    | 10                  | 9                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | 6                   | 6                   |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 36                  | 32                  |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 41                  | 47                  |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 69                  | 78                  |
| Unclassified                                     | *                   | 18                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification               | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Banbridge Total</b>                        | <b>383</b>          | <b>408</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                              |                     |                     |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                   | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                          | 34                  | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                       | *                   | *                   |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard         | *                   | *                   |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens | *                   | *                   |
| Filling Stations                              | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development     | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Residential Development    | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                  | *                   | *                   |
| Libraries etc                                 | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                             | *                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                 | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties       | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                     | 17                  | 15                  |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)            | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)     | 76                  | 83                  |
| Privately Built Housing                       | *                   | 8                   |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                 | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                   | *                   | *                   |

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 96                  | 105                 |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 113                 | 115                 |
| Unclassified                                     | 7                   | 62                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification            | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Belfast Total</b>                       | <b>4,073</b>        | <b>4,640</b>        |
| <b>Of which:</b>                           |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs             | 58                  | 63                  |
| Car Parks                                  | 534                 | 882                 |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                | 11                  | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                       | 199                 | 51                  |
| Commercial Unclassified                    | 18                  | *                   |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard      | *                   | *                   |
| Filling Stations                           | *                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes       | 11                  | 10                  |
| Hotels etc – Unlicensed                    | 8                   | 6                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development  | 106                 | *                   |
| Land Available for Residential Development | 29                  | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments               | *                   | *                   |
| Libraries etc                              | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Betting Shops                     | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                          | 15                  | 9                   |
| Manufactories                              | 72                  | 66                  |
| Markets, Marts                             | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties    | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Unclassified                 | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                  | 41                  | 24                  |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)         | 54                  | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)  | 1,324               | 1,437               |
| Privately Built Housing                    | 19                  | 24                  |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines              | *                   | *                   |
| Rights and Tolls                           | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                | 19                  | 13                  |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc        | 749                 | 754                 |
| Sites and Yards                            | 16                  | 13                  |

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Sporting Recreational                            | 6                   | *                   |
| Utilities  | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 649                 | 629                 |
| Unclassified                                     | 117                 | 636                 |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Carrickfergus Total</b>                       | <b>214</b>          | <b>217</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                 |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                   | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                             | *                   | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                          | *                   | 6                   |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens    | *                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes             | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Residential Development       | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                     | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                                | *                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                    | 15                  | 14                  |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties          | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 46                  | 45                  |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 45                  | 33                  |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 81                  | 89                  |
| Unclassified                                     | *                   | 22                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification      | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Castlereagh Total</b>             | <b>230</b>          | <b>254</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                     |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs       | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                 | 17                  | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified              | *                   | 6                   |
| Filling Stations                     | *                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes | 8                   | 7                   |

| <b>District Council/Classification</b>           | <b>As at 31 March 2010</b> | <b>As at 18 March 2012</b> |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Land Available for Residential Development       | *                          | *                          |
| Law and Order Establishments                     | *                          | *                          |
| Libraries etc                                    | *                          | *                          |
| Licensed Premises                                | *                          | *                          |
| Manufactories                                    | 24                         | 19                         |
| Miscellaneous Education, Cultural, Scientific    | *                          | *                          |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | *                          | *                          |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                          | *                          |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 42                         | 54                         |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                          | *                          |
| Schools etc                                      | *                          | *                          |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 46                         | 30                         |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                          | *                          |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                          | *                          |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 69                         | 71                         |
| Unclassified                                     | *                          | 48                         |

\* 5 properties or less

#### **Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification**

| <b>District Council/Classification</b>        | <b>As at 31 March 2010</b> | <b>As at 18 March 2012</b> |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Coleraine Total</b>                        | <b>483</b>                 | <b>500</b>                 |
| <b>Of which:</b>                              |                            |                            |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                | *                          | *                          |
| Car Parks                                     | *                          | *                          |
| Closed Hereditaments                          | *                          | *                          |
| Commercial Unclassified                       | *                          | *                          |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard         | *                          | *                          |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens | *                          | *                          |
| Filling Stations                              | *                          | *                          |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes          | *                          | *                          |
| Hotels etc - Licensed                         | *                          | *                          |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                       | *                          | *                          |
| Land Available for Commercial Development     | *                          | *                          |
| Land Available for Residential Development    | *                          | *                          |
| Law and Order Establishments                  | *                          | *                          |
| Licensed Premises                             | *                          | *                          |
| Manufactories                                 | 14                         | 12                         |

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Miscellaneous Education, Cultural, Scientific    | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties          | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | 15                  | 12                  |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 76                  | 75                  |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                   | 7                   |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                    | *                   | *                   |
| Rights and Tolls                                 | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                      | 7                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 132                 | 120                 |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                   | *                   |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 169                 | 181                 |
| Unclassified                                     | 11                  | 58                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification               | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Cookstown Total</b>                        | <b>395</b>          | <b>417</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                              |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                | *                   | *                   |
| Car Parks                                     | *                   | *                   |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                   | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                          | *                   | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                       | 7                   | *                   |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens | 18                  | *                   |
| Filling Stations                              | *                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes          | *                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                       | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development     | 9                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Residential Development    | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                  | *                   | *                   |
| Libraries etc                                 | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                             | *                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                 | 14                  | 12                  |
| Markets, Marts                                | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties       | *                   | *                   |

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | 14                  | 12                  |
| Nurseries and Garden Centres                     | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 67                  | 68                  |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                   | 8                   |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                    | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                      | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 72                  | 74                  |
| Sites and Yards                                  | 6                   | 7                   |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 148                 | 150                 |
| Unclassified                                     | *                   | 60                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification                   | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Craigavon Total</b>                            | <b>867</b>          | <b>826</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                  |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                    | 19                  | 13                  |
| Car Parks   | *                   | *                   |
| Caravan Sites, Camp Sites and Holiday Chalets etc | *                   | *                   |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                       | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                              | 19                  | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                           | *                   | *                   |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard             | *                   | *                   |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens     | *                   | *                   |
| Filling Stations                                  | *                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes              | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development         | 6                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                                 | *                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                     | 39                  | 35                  |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties           | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                         | 23                  | 17                  |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)                | 10                  | *                   |
| Nurseries and Garden Centres                      | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)         | 184                 | 186                 |
| Privately Built Housing                           | 6                   | 7                   |
| Public Built Housing                              | *                   | *                   |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                     | *                   | *                   |

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Schools etc                                      | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 216                 | 196                 |
| Sites and Yards                                  | 14                  | 12                  |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 289                 | 264                 |
| Unclassified                                     | 19                  | 83                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification                   | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| Derry Total                                       | 787                 | 817                 |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                  |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                    | 19                  | 6                   |
| Caravan Sites, Camp Sites and Holiday Chalets etc | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                              | 12                  | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                           | 10                  | *                   |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard             | *                   | *                   |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens     | *                   | *                   |
| Filling Stations                                  | *                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes              | 7                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Licensed                             | *                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                           | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development         | 15                  | *                   |
| Land Available for Industrial/FT Development      | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Miscellaneous Development      | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Residential Development        | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                      | *                   | *                   |
| Libraries etc                                     | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                                 | *                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                     | 24                  | 13                  |
| Markets, Marts                                    | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties           | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                         | *                   | 6                   |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)                | 17                  | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)         | 200                 | 227                 |
| Privately Built Housing                           | *                   | *                   |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                     | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                       | *                   | *                   |

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 162                 | 167                 |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                   | *                   |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 265                 | 270                 |
| Unclassified                                     | 18                  | 96                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification               | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Down Total</b>                             | <b>591</b>          | <b>605</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                              |                     |                     |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                   | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                          | 22                  | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                       | *                   | *                   |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard         | *                   | *                   |
| Filling Stations                              | *                   | *                   |
| Freight Transport (other than Public Utility) | *                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes          | *                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Licensed                         | *                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                       | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development     | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Residential Development    | 6                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                  | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                             | 7                   | 6                   |
| Manufactories                                 | 18                  | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Education, Cultural, Scientific | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties       | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                     | 15                  | 13                  |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)            | *                   | *                   |
| Nurseries and Garden Centres                  | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)     | 99                  | 105                 |
| Privately Built Housing                       | 9                   | 16                  |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                 | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                   | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc           | 146                 | 137                 |
| Sites and Yards                               | 8                   | 8                   |
| Sporting Recreational                         | 6                   | *                   |
| Utilities                                     | *                   | *                   |



| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 214                 | 189                 |
| Unclassified                                     | 9                   | 98                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Dungannon &amp; South Tyrone Total</b>        | <b>574</b>          | <b>626</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                 |                     |                     |
| Closed Hereditaments                             | *                   | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                          | 6                   | 17                  |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard            | *                   | *                   |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens    | 20                  | *                   |
| Filling Stations                                 | *                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes             | *                   | 7                   |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                          | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                     | 6                   | *                   |
| Libraries etc                                    | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                                | *                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                    | 34                  | 22                  |
| Miscellaneous Land Use                           | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties          | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Unclassified                       | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | 21                  | 22                  |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                   | *                   |
| Nurseries and Garden Centres                     | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 102                 | 110                 |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                   | 6                   |
| Rights and Tolls                                 | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                      | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 137                 | 145                 |
| Sites and Yards                                  | 8                   | 11                  |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Utilities  | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 188                 | 204                 |
| Unclassified                                     | 15                  | 57                  |

\* 5 properties or less

**Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification**

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Fermanagh Total</b>                           | <b>679</b>          | <b>710</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                 |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                   | *                   | *                   |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                      | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                             | *                   | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                          | 20                  | 13                  |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard            | *                   | *                   |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens    | 32                  | *                   |
| Filling Stations                                 | 7                   | 6                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes             | *                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Licensed                            | *                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                          | 10                  | 10                  |
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Residential Development       | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                     | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                                | 6                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                    | 28                  | 20                  |
| Markets, Marts                                   | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Education, Cultural, Scientific    | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Land Use                           | *                   | *                   |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties          | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | 27                  | 25                  |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                   | *                   |
| Nurseries and Garden Centres                     | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 100                 | 107                 |
| Privately Built Housing                          | 7                   | 11                  |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                    | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                      | 10                  | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 154                 | 169                 |
| Sites and Yards                                  | 10                  | 12                  |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 215                 | 221                 |
| Unclassified                                     | 12                  | 88                  |

\* 5 properties or less

**Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification**

| <b>District Council/Classification</b>           | <b>As at 31 March 2010</b> | <b>As at 18 March 2012</b> |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Larne Total</b>                               | <b>247</b>                 | <b>259</b>                 |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                 |                            |                            |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                   | *                          | *                          |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                      | *                          | *                          |
| Closed Hereditaments                             | *                          | *                          |
| Commercial Unclassified                          | *                          | *                          |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens    | *                          | *                          |
| Filling Stations                                 | *                          | *                          |
| Hotels etc - Licensed                            | *                          | *                          |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                          | *                          | *                          |
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | *                          | *                          |
| Licensed Premises                                | *                          | *                          |
| Manufactories                                    | 9                          | 10                         |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | *                          | *                          |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                          | *                          |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 41                         | 44                         |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                          | *                          |
| Schools etc                                      | *                          | *                          |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 77                         | 70                         |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                          | *                          |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                          | *                          |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 83                         | 89                         |
| Unclassified                                     | *                          | 20                         |

\* 5 properties or less

**Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification**

| <b>District Council/Classification</b>        | <b>As at 31 March 2010</b> | <b>As at 18 March 2012</b> |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Limavady Total</b>                         | <b>283</b>                 | <b>299</b>                 |
| <b>Of which:</b>                              |                            |                            |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                | *                          | *                          |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                   | *                          | *                          |
| Commercial Unclassified                       | *                          | *                          |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard         | *                          | *                          |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens | *                          | *                          |
| Filling Stations                              | *                          | *                          |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes          | *                          | *                          |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                       | *                          | *                          |

| <b>District Council/Classification</b>           | <b>As at 31 March 2010</b> | <b>As at 18 March 2012</b> |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | *                          | *                          |
| Land Available for Residential Development       | *                          | *                          |
| Licensed Premises                                | 7                          | 6                          |
| Manufactories                                    | 15                         | 10                         |
| Markets, Marts                                   | *                          | *                          |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties          | *                          | *                          |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | 6                          | *                          |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 44                         | 49                         |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                          | *                          |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                    | *                          | *                          |
| Schools etc                                      | *                          | *                          |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 57                         | 67                         |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                          | *                          |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 112                        | 114                        |
| Unclassified                                     | *                          | 24                         |

\* 5 properties or less

#### **Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification**

| <b>District Council/Classification</b>     | <b>As at 31 March 2010</b> | <b>As at 18 March 2012</b> |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Lisburn</b>                             | <b>714</b>                 | <b>760</b>                 |
| <b>Of which:</b>                           |                            |                            |
| Advertising Stations and Signs             | 7                          | 7                          |
| Car Parks                                  | 11                         | 11                         |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                | *                          | *                          |
| Closed Hereditaments                       | 33                         | 6                          |
| Commercial Unclassified                    | 7                          | 7                          |
| Filling Stations                           | *                          | *                          |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes       | *                          | *                          |
| Land Available for Commercial Development  | 9                          | *                          |
| Land Available for Residential Development | *                          | *                          |
| Law and Order Establishments               | *                          | *                          |
| Licensed Premises                          | 6                          | *                          |
| Manufactories                              | 46                         | 30                         |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                  | 14                         | 13                         |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)         | 9                          | *                          |
| Nurseries and Garden Centres               | *                          | *                          |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)  | 156                        | 173                        |
| Privately Built Housing                    | 6                          | 12                         |

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                    | *                   | *                   |
| Rights and Tolls                                 | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                      | 14                  | 14                  |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 160                 | 154                 |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                   | *                   |
| Sporting Recreational                            | 8                   | 8                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 203                 | 200                 |
| Unclassified                                     | *                   | 112                 |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Magherafelt</b>                               | <b>401</b>          | <b>407</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                 |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                   | *                   | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                          | 9                   | *                   |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard            | *                   | *                   |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens    | 6                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes             | *                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Licensed                            | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | 6                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Ent. & Rec. Development       | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Residential Development       | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                     | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                                | *                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                    | 13                  | 9                   |
| Miscellaneous Education, Cultural, Scientific    | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | 10                  | 11                  |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | 6                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 88                  | 74                  |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                      | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 114                 | 96                  |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 124                 | 133                 |
| Unclassified                                     | *                   | 64                  |

\* 5 properties or less

**Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification**

| <b>District Council/Classification</b>           | <b>As at 31 March 2010</b> | <b>As at 18 March 2012</b> |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Moyle Total</b>                               | <b>103</b>                 | <b>112</b>                 |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                 |                            |                            |
| Closed Hereditaments                             | *                          | *                          |
| Commercial Unclassified                          | *                          | *                          |
| Filling Stations                                 | *                          | *                          |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes             | *                          | *                          |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                          | *                          | *                          |
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | *                          | *                          |
| Land Available for Ed./Cultural Development      | *                          | *                          |
| Land Available for Residential Development       | *                          | *                          |
| Law and Order Establishments                     | *                          | *                          |
| Libraries etc                                    | *                          | *                          |
| Manufactories                                    | *                          | *                          |
| Markets, Marts                                   | *                          | *                          |
| Miscellaneous Education, Cultural, Scientific    | *                          | *                          |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | *                          | *                          |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 16                         | 14                         |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                          | *                          |
| Schools etc                                      | *                          | *                          |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 34                         | 34                         |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                          | *                          |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 26                         | 29                         |
| Unclassified                                     | *                          | 13                         |

\* 5 properties or less

**Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification**

| <b>District Council/Classification</b>        | <b>As at 31 March 2010</b> | <b>As at 18 March 2012</b> |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Newry &amp; Mourne Total</b>               | <b>938</b>                 | <b>941</b>                 |
| <b>Of which:</b>                              |                            |                            |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                | *                          | 7                          |
| Closed Hereditaments                          | 11                         | *                          |
| Commercial Unclassified                       | *                          | *                          |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard         | *                          | *                          |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens | 7                          | *                          |
| Filling Stations                              | *                          | *                          |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes          | *                          | *                          |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                       | *                          | *                          |
| Land Available for Commercial Development     | 7                          | *                          |

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Land Available for Residential Development       | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                     | *                   | *                   |
| Libraries etc                                    | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                                | 13                  | 7                   |
| Manufactories                                    | 41                  | 30                  |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties          | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | 26                  | 19                  |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                   | *                   |
| Nurseries and Garden Centres                     | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 211                 | 210                 |
| Privately Built Housing                          | 6                   | 12                  |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                    | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                      | 15                  | 12                  |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 270                 | 255                 |
| Sites and Yards                                  | 12                  | 14                  |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 263                 | 258                 |
| Unclassified                                     | 23                  | 95                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification               | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Newtownabbey Total</b>                     | <b>497</b>          | <b>499</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                              |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                | 7                   | *                   |
| Churches, Church Halls, etc                   | *                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                          | 25                  | 6                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                       | 13                  | 15                  |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens | *                   | *                   |
| Filling Stations                              | *                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes          | *                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                       | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development     | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Residential Development    | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                             | *                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                 | 26                  | 16                  |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties       | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                     | *                   | *                   |

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 118                 | 116                 |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                      | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 94                  | 77                  |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                   | *                   |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 188                 | 177                 |
| Unclassified                                     | 7                   | 66                  |

\* 5 properties or less

#### Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>North Down Total</b>                          | <b>363</b>          | <b>447</b>          |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                 |                     |                     |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                   | 7                   | *                   |
| Closed Hereditaments                             | 9                   | *                   |
| Commercial Unclassified                          | 8                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes             | *                   | *                   |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                          | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | 6                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Ed./Cultural Development      | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Residential Development       | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                                | *                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                    | 16                  | 11                  |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                   | *                   |
| Nurseries and Garden Centres                     | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 101                 | 123                 |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                   | 8                   |
| Schools etc                                      | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 101                 | 101                 |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                   | *                   |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 79                  | 106                 |
| Unclassified                                     | *                   | 69                  |

\* 5 properties or less



**Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification**

| <b>District Council/Classification</b>           | <b>As at 31 March 2010</b> | <b>As at 18 March 2012</b> |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Omagh Total</b>                               | <b>589</b>                 | <b>600</b>                 |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                 |                            |                            |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                   | *                          | *                          |
| Closed Hereditaments                             | 8                          | *                          |
| Commercial Unclassified                          | 9                          | 16                         |
| Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard            | *                          | *                          |
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens    | 20                         | *                          |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes             | 7                          | 7                          |
| Hotels etc - Unlicensed                          | 10                         | 9                          |
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | *                          | *                          |
| Land Available for Residential Development       | *                          | *                          |
| Licensed Premises                                | 7                          | *                          |
| Manufactories                                    | 13                         | 16                         |
| Markets, Marts                                   | *                          | *                          |
| Miscellaneous Land Use                           | 6                          | *                          |
| Miscellaneous Public Service Properties          | *                          | *                          |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | 16                         | 14                         |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | 11                         | *                          |
| Nurseries and Garden Centres                     | *                          | *                          |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 141                        | 133                        |
| Privately Built Housing                          | 16                         | 13                         |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                    | *                          | *                          |
| Schools etc                                      | 9                          | 6                          |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 107                        | 99                         |
| Sites and Yards                                  | 9                          | 7                          |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                          | *                          |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 172                        | 184                        |
| Unclassified                                     | 11                         | 78                         |

\* 5 properties or less

**Unoccupied Non-domestic properties by District Council Area and Classification**

| <b>District Council/Classification</b>            | <b>As at 31 March 2010</b> | <b>As at 18 March 2012</b> |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Strabane</b>                                   | <b>353</b>                 | <b>346</b>                 |
| <b>Of which:</b>                                  |                            |                            |
| Advertising Stations and Signs                    | *                          | *                          |
| Caravan Sites, Camp Sites and Holiday Chalets etc | *                          | *                          |
| Closed Hereditaments                              | *                          | *                          |
| Commercial Unclassified                           | 6                          | *                          |

| District Council/Classification                  | As at 31 March 2010 | As at 18 March 2012 |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Farms, Agricultural Buildings, Market Gardens    | *                   | *                   |
| Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes             | *                   | *                   |
| Land Available for Commercial Development        | *                   | *                   |
| Law and Order Establishments                     | *                   | *                   |
| Licensed Premises                                | 7                   | *                   |
| Manufactories                                    | 8                   | 12                  |
| Markets, Marts                                   | *                   | *                   |
| Non-Sporting Rec Facility                        | 14                  | 10                  |
| Non-Hereditaments (no other Class)               | *                   | *                   |
| Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)        | 73                  | 67                  |
| Privately Built Housing                          | *                   | 6                   |
| Quarries, Sand Pits and Mines                    | *                   | *                   |
| Schools etc                                      | *                   | *                   |
| Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets, etc              | 82                  | 72                  |
| Sites and Yards                                  | *                   | 6                   |
| Sporting Recreational                            | *                   | *                   |
| Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, Garages (Non-IND) | 123                 | 123                 |
| Unclassified                                     | *                   | 37                  |

\* 5 properties or less

### Carrickfergus: Vacant Non-domestic Properties

**Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of vacant non-domestic properties in Carrickfergus Town Centre.

**(AQW 9760/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Information on the number of vacant non-domestic properties in Carrickfergus Town Centre is not available as information is collated by Land & Property Services at District Council and Ward levels only. The number of vacant non-domestic properties in each Ward in the Carrickfergus Borough Council area as at 18th March 2012 is given in the table overleaf.

| Ward/Council | Number of Vacant Non-Domestic Properties |
|--------------|--|
| Blackhead    | 7  |
| Bluefield    | *  |
| Boneybefore  | 10                                       |
| Clipperstown | *  |
| Eden         | 49                                       |
| Gortalee     | *  |
| Greenisland  | 40                                       |
| Killycrot    | 75                                       |
| Knockagh     | *  |
| Love Lane    | *  |
| Milebush     | *  |
| Northland    | *  |

| Ward/Council                         | Number of Vacant Non-Domestic Properties |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Sunnylands                           | *  |
| Victoria                             | *  |
| Whitehead                            | 11                                       |
| Woodburn                             | 8  |
| <b>Carrickfergus Borough Council</b> | <b>217</b>                               |

\* 5 properties or less

### Public Sector: Regional Pay

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the potential financial impact on the Block Grant and the economy if regional pay rates for the public sector are introduced.

**(AQW 9805/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** I am very concerned that the introduction of regional pay and any associated block adjustment (if made) would harm Northern Ireland's economic recovery. The prospect of reduced public expenditure and a protracted pay freeze for public sector workers would reduce economic activity and damage consumer and business confidence in the region.

I made this point forcefully to the Chief Secretary when I met him along with Scottish and Welsh counterparts prior to the Budget in March. I also put on record my view that I don't accept that national pay agreements create problems for the private sector in terms of the recruitment or retention of staff.

I can assure you that I will be vigorously opposing any move to implement regional pay rates for public sector workers and I am confident that Ministers in the other two devolved administrations as well as representatives from a number of the English regions will be doing the same.

### Public Sector: Regional Pay

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail any discussions his Department has had with the Treasury regarding regional pay rates.

**(AQW 9817/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Danny Alexander MP, wrote following the Autumn Statement in November 2011 and again in January 2012 to inform me of the work the Government had asked the Pay Review Bodies to take forward on the regional public sector pay issue and we discussed this along with Scottish and Welsh counterparts at a Finance Ministers Quadrilateral meeting on 5th March 2012.

We were advised that the work in this regard was at a very early stage and that there would be negotiations with each of the Devolved Administrations before a final decision is taken. However, I did take the opportunity to raise with the Chief Secretary my very significant concerns about any move towards regional pay, as did the Scottish and Welsh Finance Ministers.

I don't accept that national pay agreements create problems for the private sector in terms of the recruitment or retention of staff and I am very concerned about any suggestion of an associated regional pay block adjustment that would have a negative economic impact on Northern Ireland. I can assure you that I will vigorously oppose any such changes which I believe would harm Northern Ireland's economic recovery.

### Public Sector: Regional Pay

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail any discussions that have taken place at the Joint Ministerial Consultative Committee in London regarding regional pay rates.

**(AQW 9818/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Danny Alexander MP, wrote following the Autumn Statement in November 2011 and again in January 2012 to inform me of the work the Government had asked the Pay Review Bodies to take forward on the regional public sector pay issue and we discussed this along with Scottish and Welsh counterparts at a Finance Ministers Quadrilateral meeting on 5th March 2012.

We were advised that the work in this regard was at a very early stage and that there would be negotiations with each of the Devolved Administrations before a final decision is taken. However, I did take the opportunity to raise with the Chief Secretary my very significant concerns about any move towards regional pay, as did the Scottish and Welsh Finance Ministers.

I don't accept that national pay agreements create problems for the private sector in terms of the recruitment or retention of staff and I am very concerned about any suggestion of an associated regional pay block adjustment that would have a negative economic impact on Northern Ireland. I can assure you that I will vigorously oppose any such changes which I believe would harm Northern Ireland's economic recovery.

## Public Procurement: Predatory Pricing

**Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what checks and balances are in place to protect companies from predatory pricing in relation to public sector tendering.

**(AQW 9821/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Northern Ireland public procurement policy requires all procurement to be carried out by a Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) or by means of a service level agreement with one.

EU and UK Procurement legislation and the Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy, require competition, openness, transparency, fairness and non-discrimination in the contract award process.

The Directives and Regulations mandate that contracts must be awarded on the basis of either the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT), which is a combination of price and quality/non-price criteria, or on the lowest price to meet clearly stated contract requirements and minimum standards. In line with this all tender documentation must clearly state at the commencement of the process the contract requirements and the criteria to be used to assess tenders.

The use of the eSourcingNI system by Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) and the CoPEs prevents submitted tenders being accessed until after the deadline for submission of tenders. The system also provides a clear record of the tender process until the point of award.

Other checks and balances within the procurement process include -

- proportionate advertising to ensure sufficient tenders to provide genuine competition;
- allowing appropriate and proportionate time for responses to tendering opportunities;
- holding all commercial data within the secure eSourcingNI system;
- using the knowledge and skills of procurement professionals to identify any unusual trends; and
- ensuring that all specifications are non discriminatory.

Instances of unusual pricing would be treated on a case by case basis, bearing in mind the principles of transparency, fairness and a competitive process. If considered appropriate, investigations would be instigated to ensure that the tenderer had the resources and capacity to carry out the work as specified. Effective management of the contract post- award ensures that the work is being carried out as required and to the standard expected.

## North/South Bodies: 2011 Business Cases

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the 2011 business cases for each of the North-South bodies were approved.

**(AQW 9824/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** I am making the assumption that you are referring to the Business Plans for each of the North South Bodies.

The table below sets out the North South Body and the date that the NSMC approved the 2011 Business Plans.

| North South Body                               | Date of NSMC Approval |
|--|-----------------------|
| Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission | 26/07/2011            |
| The Food Safety Promotion Board                | 20/07/2011            |
| Waterways Ireland                              | 12/10/2011            |
| InterTradelreland                              | 21/09/2011            |
| The Special EU Programmes Body                 | 21/09/2011            |
| Language Body                                  | 14/02/2012            |
| Tourism Ireland                                | 25/01/2012            |

## Rates: Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what plans there are for the extension of the Small Business Rates Relief scheme; (ii) whether there will be any changes to the qualifying criteria; and (iii) how much the scheme is expected to save small businesses each year.

**(AQW 9827/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Executive has approved the extension of the small business rate relief scheme through until 31 March 2015, which will enable a further 8,300 business ratepayers to benefit from the scheme over three years. As a result 20% relief will automatically be awarded on properties with a net annual value (NAV) of £5,001 - £10,000. The amount of relief under the main scheme will be broadly doubled, increasing the number receiving help by around 50%. The extension of the scheme will provide

additional support of around £6 million per year. It is anticipated that in the 2012/13 rating year over £12m could be awarded to small businesses under the main scheme.

The average award under the expanded scheme will be in the region of £740 per year. I would refer the Member to my answer to AQW 9599/11-15 for more information on the average award under the scheme more generally.

The qualifying criteria for the scheme will remain broadly the same as at present, with relief to be awarded on qualifying properties with an NAV of £10,000 and below. Certain types of hereditaments such as ATMs, car parks, advertising hoardings and telecommunications masts among others will continue to be excluded from the scheme.

One change to the qualifying criteria will be made as a result of the consultation that was carried out last year. From 1 April, ratepayers occupying multiple hereditaments, that is more than three premises in total, will not be entitled to relief under the main small business rate relief scheme. Around 1,500 – 2,000 properties could be affected, with savings of around £1m a year. I will also consider this matter further, with a view to refining the criteria used, for the 2013/14 and 2014/15 rating years.

Should the savings from excluding 'multiples' be significant I will also look at providing increased relief under the expanded scheme in 2013/14 and 2014/15, including the savings from the 2012/13 rating year.

## Unemployment: Inequality

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to (i) identify the 38 electoral wards with the highest rates of unemployment; (ii) the percentage of people from a (a) Catholic; and (b) Protestant community background in each of these 38 wards, according to the most recent census information; and (iii) what action will be taken to tackle any obvious inequalities that exist in these figures.

**(AQW 9849/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The official measure of unemployment is sourced from the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, as a sample survey, the LFS is not designed to provide unemployment estimates at ward level.

Robust unemployment statistics can be produced at ward level from the claimant count measure of unemployment. An unemployment rate can be defined as the number of claimants expressed as a percentage of the working-age (16-64 years old) population. The table below lists the 38 electoral wards in Northern Ireland with the highest unemployment rates, based on the claimant count, at February 2012.

'Community background' was derived in the 2001 Census of Population, based on a combination of respondents' religion and – when respondents indicated that they had no religion - 'religion brought up in'. The percentage of the ward population that had a Catholic community background, and the percentage that had a Protestant community background, is also given for each of the 38 listed wards.

**Table 1 – The 38 electoral wards with the highest unemployment rates (claimant count as a percentage of the population aged 16-64, February 2012)**

| Local Government District | Ward              | % of the population from a Catholic Community Background (2001 Census) | % of the population from a Protestant Community Background (2001 Census) |
|---------------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| Armagh                    | Callan Bridge     | 89   | 10   |
| Belfast                   | Ardoyne           | 96   | 3  |
| Belfast                   | Ballymacarrett    | 51   | 47   |
| Belfast                   | Blackstaff        | 4  | 91   |
| Belfast                   | Clonard           | 96   | 3  |
| Belfast                   | Crumlin           | 4  | 94   |
| Belfast                   | Duncairn          | 6  | 90   |
| Belfast                   | Falls             | 97   | 3  |
| Belfast                   | New Lodge         | 97   | 2  |
| Belfast                   | Shankill          | 3  | 94   |
| Belfast                   | The Mount         | 4  | 90   |
| Belfast                   | Upper Springfield | 97   | 3  |
| Belfast                   | Water Works       | 91   | 7  |

| Local Government District | Ward             | % of the population from a Catholic Community Background (2001 Census) | % of the population from a Protestant Community Background (2001 Census) |
|---------------------------|------------------|--|--|
| Belfast                   | Whiterock        | 99   | 1  |
| Belfast                   | Woodvale         | 3  | 95   |
| Carrickfergus             | Gortalee         | 7  | 87   |
| Coleraine                 | Central          | 22   | 74   |
| Derry                     | Brandywell       | 99   | 1  |
| Derry                     | Creggan Central  | 99   | 1  |
| Derry                     | Creggan South    | 99   | 1  |
| Derry                     | Ebrington        | 33   | 60   |
| Derry                     | Rosemount        | 93   | 5  |
| Derry                     | Shantallow East  | 98   | 1  |
| Derry                     | Strand           | 91   | 7  |
| Derry                     | The Diamond      | 81   | 18   |
| Derry                     | Victoria         | 68   | 31   |
| Derry                     | Westland         | 98   | 1  |
| Down                      | Ballymote        | 88   | 11   |
| Dungannon                 | Coalisland South | 94   | 6  |
| Fermanagh                 | Devenish         | 88   | 11   |
| Limavady                  | Coolessan        | 62   | 36   |
| Limavady                  | Greystone        | 49   | 49   |
| Lisburn                   | Collin Glen      | 96   | 3  |
| Lisburn                   | Twinbrook        | 97   | 3  |
| Moyle                     | Bushmills        | 3  | 95   |
| Newry & Mourne            | Ballybot         | 97   | 3  |
| Newtownabbey              | Valley           | 52   | 45   |
| Strabane                  | East             | 97   | 3  |

The draft Programme for Government states that all policies and programmes across Government will be built upon the values of equality and fairness.

### Papers for Assembly Committees

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail all occasions in the last 12 months when his Department has made a presentation to an Assembly committee and provided papers pertaining to that presentation to the committee less than 48 hours beforehand.

**(AQW 9930/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** During the last 12 months my Department has provided papers to an Assembly committee within 48 hours of a presentation on the following two occasions:-

- i the Consultation on Claims for Wrongful Deaths on 29/06/2011; and
- ii the Report of the NI Law Commission on taking evidence from vulnerable witnesses in civil proceedings on 26/10/2011.

## Budget Statement: Impact on Block Grant and Barnett Consequentials

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact on the Block Grant and the Barnett Consequentials of the Chancellor's Budgetary Statement.

**(AQW 9941/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Chancellor's 2012 UK Budget Statement was disappointing in that it resulted in very limited Barnett consequentials for Northern Ireland.

In terms of Resource DEL this amounted to £7.2 million over the next three years. The profile of these Barnett additions is £3.3 million in 2012-13; £2.3 million in 2013-14; and £1.6 million in 2014-15.

There were also £4.5 million of Capital DEL allocated to Northern Ireland over the next three years. However, these score as a financial transaction and can only be used to offer loans or equity investment. A further condition on this funding is that 60% must be repaid to the Exchequer by 2019-20.

## Rates: Relief for Service Personnel

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the Council Tax Relief in Great Britain for service personnel serving abroad, what parallel rates relief exists in Northern Ireland or what plans his Department has to introduce similar provisions.

**(AQW 10011/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The scheme operating in England, Wales and Scotland applies to Northern Ireland as well, notwithstanding that we have domestic rates instead of the Council Tax. It is administered by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). DFP and LPS has no involvement in the scheme, policy-wise or operationally.

Northern Ireland Personnel serving abroad are entitled to the same terms as those applying in the rest of the UK. All service personnel who own and rent a private property do however remain liable to pay full rates on their property to the Land and Property Services, the MOD scheme provides partial reimbursement, subject to their criteria, 'after the event', rather than an application of discount.

The MOD council tax relief scheme is paid as a tax-free lump sum on completion of duty, based on the number of days in the qualifying operational location.

I am advised that service personnel who wish to claim council tax relief from MOD are required to provide their Unit's human resources staff with a council tax bill (rates bill in Northern Ireland) for the periods in question, confirming they are liable for council tax / rates at that property and that they have not been given any other council tax / rates discount (such as a vacancy allowance) due to their deployment on operations.

Those eligible for the scheme include all regular service personnel, mobilised reserves and full-time reserve service (full or limited commitment) personnel serving in operational locations specified by the MOD who pay rates in Northern Ireland for a private property or contributions in lieu of council tax for service families accommodation

## Stillbirths and Neonatal Deaths

**Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of (i) stillbirths; and (ii) neo-natal deaths in each of the last five years in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area, broken down by hospital.

**(AQW 10073/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The tables overleaf give the number of stillbirths and neonatal deaths that occurred in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust by place of stillbirth/death for each year between 2006 and 2011(Quarter 1–Quarter 3P).

P Provisional Data

**Table 1: Number of stillbirths which occurred in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust by place of stillbirth and registration year, 2006 to 2011, Quarter 1 to Quarter 3P**

| Place of Stillbirth      | Registration Year |           |           |           |           |                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------|
|                          | 2006              | 2007      | 2008      | 2009      | 2010      | 2011 Q1-Q3 <sup>P</sup> |
| Mater Maternity Hospital | 5                 | 5         | 4         | 6         | 3         | 1                       |
| Royal Group of Hospitals | 24                | 25        | 33        | 28        | 25        | 16                      |
| All Other Places         | -                 | -         | -         | -         | -         | 1                       |
| <b>Total in BHSC</b>     | <b>29</b>         | <b>30</b> | <b>37</b> | <b>34</b> | <b>28</b> | <b>18</b>               |

**Table 2: Number of neonatal deaths which occurred in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust by place of death and registration year, 2006 to 2011, Quarter 1 to Quarter 3P**

| Place of Neonatal Deaths | Registration Year |           |           |           |           |             |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
|                          | 2006              | 2007      | 2008      | 2009      | 2010      | 2011 Q1-Q3P |
| Mater Maternity Hospital | -                 | -         | 1         | 2         | -         | -           |
| Royal Group of Hospitals | 45                | 43        | 45        | 39        | 57        | 37          |
| All Other Places         | -                 | -         | 1         | -         | -         | -           |
| <b>Total in BHSCT</b>    | <b>45</b>         | <b>43</b> | <b>47</b> | <b>41</b> | <b>57</b> | <b>37</b>   |

## Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

### Hospitals: No Smoking Zones

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to make hospitals and hospital grounds no smoking zones.

(AQW 9711/11-15)

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** Hospitals, like virtually all enclosed or substantially enclosed public and workplaces, are already designated as smoke-free under the Smoking (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. Open spaces, such as hospital grounds, are currently outside the scope of the 2006 Order. The issue of smoking in hospital grounds is a matter for each Health and Social Care Trust to address through its workplace policy on smoking. I understand that these policies differ, ranging from those which do not permit smoking at all on Trust-owned property, to those where smoking is permitted in designated areas.

The issue of smoking outside hospital entrances was highlighted in my Department's new Tobacco Control Strategy. I expect implementation of the strategy to include measures aimed at gaining greater consistency on smoking policies with all health and social care sites moving towards smoke-free hospital grounds.

### Diabetes: Insulin Pumps for Children

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to alleviate the delay in the allocation of insulin pumps to children in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area, given the inadequacy of resources for the necessary education programme.

(AQW 9713/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** My Department has endorsed National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance on the use of insulin pump therapy. The HSC has been working to implement the guidance and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust currently has 36 children and young people receiving insulin pump therapy. However further implementation has been temporarily suspended due to current demands and team changes within the Paediatric Diabetic Team. I am advised by the South Eastern Trust that it is assessing options across its diabetic provision to determine if there are internal opportunities to address this and resume the insulin pump implementation programme. The Trust further advises that it is currently discussing acute paediatric resource issues, including the paediatric diabetic service, with the service commissioner.

### Hospitals: Hygiene Audits

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration he has given to making areas of hospitals, which continually fail or have poor results in their hygiene audits, subject to weekly audits by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority until standards have been raised.

(AQW 9716/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** The requirements for environmental cleanliness audits are defined in "Cleanliness Matters 2005-2008 – A Regional Strategy for Improving the Standard of Environmental Cleanliness in HSS Trusts". Daily checks and weekly departmental ward audits are the responsibility of the ward manager. The Strategy also defines the timescale for rectifying problems identified in an audit. Managerial audits are the responsibility of a team consisting of senior management from cleaning services, estates and nursing. These may also include ward managers, infection control professionals and service users. Trust internal audit staff may also audit a sample of areas for the purpose of ensuring compliance with Controls Assurance Standards.

With regard to hospitals, under the terms of the HPSS (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (NI) Order 2003, the RQIA's role is to conduct reviews and carry out inspections into the quality of services. Under the Order the RQIA's duty is to keep the Department informed about the provision of services and to encourage improvement in the quality of services. The RQIA carries



out announced and unannounced inspections of hygiene and cleanliness, using the Regional Healthcare Hygiene and Cleanliness Tool. It is not the RQIA's role to carry out weekly audits, and the RQIA is not resourced to do so.

### Accident and Emergency Departments: Staffing

**Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current allocation of doctors and nurses for day and night shifts in each hospital's Accident and Emergency Department; and whether all positions are filled. **(AQW 9752/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The information requested is provided in the tables below. All of this information has been obtained directly from individual Health and Social Care Trusts and has not been validated by the Department.

#### Belfast Trust area Accident and Emergency Units

##### Doctors

| Hospital             | Mater Hospital  |     |                | Royal Victoria Hospital |      |                |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----|----------------|-------------------------|------|----------------|
| Shifts               | Day/Night       |     |                | Day/Night               |      |                |
| Grade                | Posts Available |     | Posts Unfilled | Posts Available         |      | Posts Unfilled |
|                      | HC              | WTE | WTE            | HC                      | WTE  | WTE            |
| Consultant           | 5               | 5.0 | 0.0            | 12                      | 12.0 | 0.0            |
| Middle Grade Doctors | 10              | 9.1 | 1.0            | 8                       | 8.0  | 4.0            |
| Junior Grade Doctors | 5               | 5.0 | 1.0            | 10                      | 8.0  | 2.0            |

##### Notes:

- 1 Medical Staff within the Emergency Department work on a rotational basis through night and dayshifts. The positions filled and unfilled are indicative of the complete medical staffing. Any gaps are supplemented to at least the minimum staffing levels.
- 2 At the Mater Hospital, on weekdays, there are 2 Consultants on duty between 8am and 1pm, 1 Consultant on duty between 1pm and 6pm, a Consultant on call between 6pm and midnight and again a Consultant on call between midnight and 8am. At weekends, there is one Consultant on duty between 8am and 1pm, one Consultant on duty 1pm to 5pm, with a consultant on call between 5pm and 8am.
- 3 At the Royal Victoria Hospital, on weekdays, there are 3 Consultants on duty between 8am and 1pm, a minimum of 3 Consultants on duty between 1pm and 6pm, 1 Consultant on duty between 6pm and midnight and a Consultant on call between midnight and 8am. At weekends, there are two Consultants on duty between 8am and 1pm and one Consultant on duty between 1pm and 5pm, with a consultant on call between 5pm and 8am.

##### Nurses

| Hospital | Mater Hospital  |      |                | Royal Victoria Hospital |      |                |
|----------|-----------------|------|----------------|-------------------------|------|----------------|
| Shifts   | Day/Night       |      |                | Day/Night               |      |                |
| Grade    | Posts Available |      | Posts Unfilled | Posts Available         |      | Posts Unfilled |
|          | HC              | WTE  | WTE            | HC                      | WTE  | WTE            |
| Band 7   | 2               | 2.0  | 0.0            | 11                      | 9.6  | 0.9            |
| Band 6   | 7               | 6.0  | 1.0            | 9                       | 10.4 | 1.6            |
| Band 5   | 25              | 23.2 | 1.8            | 44                      | 42.3 | 6.9            |
| Band 3   | 4               | 4.0  | 1.3            | 13                      | 10.7 | 4.0            |
| Band 2   | 1               | 0.6  | 0.0            | 0                       | 0.0  | 0.0            |

##### Notes:

- 1 Six Band 5 nursing posts at the Royal Victoria Hospital are due to be appointed and should be in post within the next three weeks.

- 2 Nursing staff within the Emergency Department work on a rotational basis through night and day shifts. The positions filled and unfilled are indicative of the complete nursing staffing. Any gaps are supplemented to at least the minimum staffing levels.

**Breakdown of nursing staff per shift per day based on demand in the Royal Victoria Hospital**

| Day Shift | Mon | Tues | Wed | Thurs | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|-----------|-----|------|-----|-------|-----|-----|-----|
| AM        | 11  | 11   | 10  | 10    | 11  | 11  | 11  |
| PM        | 14  | 14   | 12  | 12    | 13  | 13  | 13  |
| Night     | 8   | 8    | 8   | 8     | 8   | 8   | 8   |

**Notes:**

- 1 Night shift is from 6pm – 2am.
- 2 In addition, 2 Health Care Support Workers are employed for all day and night shifts.

**Northern Trust area Accident and Emergency Units**

**Doctors**

| Hospital                 | Antrim Area Hospital |      |                |                 |     |                |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------|----------------|-----------------|-----|----------------|
| Shift                    | Day Shift            |      |                | Night Shift     |     |                |
| Grade                    | Posts Available      |      | Posts Unfilled | Posts Available |     | Posts Unfilled |
|                          | HC                   | WTE  | WTE            | HC              | WTE | WTE            |
| Consultant               | 8                    | 8.0  | 3.0            | 8 (on call)     | 8.0 | 3.0            |
| Associate Specialist     | 2                    | 2.0  | 0.0            | 2 (on call)     | 2.0 | 0.0            |
| Staff Grade              | 2                    | 1.6  | 0.0            | 2 (on call)     | 1.6 | 0.0            |
| Specialty Registrar ST4+ | 4                    | 4.0  | 0.0            | 0               | 0.0 | 0.0            |
| Specialty Registrar ST2+ | 12                   | 12.0 | 0.0            | 2               | 2.0 | 0.0            |

**Note:**

- 1 One unfilled Consultant position is currently filled by locum cover; the other two unfilled Consultant positions are new posts.

| Hospital                  | Causeway Hospital |     |                |                 |     |                |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-----|----------------|-----------------|-----|----------------|
| Shift                     | Day Shift         |     |                | Night Shift     |     |                |
| Grade                     | Posts Available   |     | Posts Unfilled | Posts Available |     | Posts Unfilled |
|                           | HC                | WTE | WTE            | HC              | WTE | WTE            |
| Consultant                | 3                 | 3.0 | 0.0            | 3 (on call)     | 3.0 | 0.0            |
| Associate Specialist      | 1                 | 1.0 | 0.0            | 1 (on call)     | 1.0 | 0.0            |
| Specialty Registrar ST1/2 | 7                 | 7.0 | 6.0            | 1               | 1.0 | 0.0            |

**Note:**

- 1 Unfilled posts are currently filled with locum cover

**Nurses**

| Hospital                     | Antrim Area Hospital |      |                | Causeway Hospital |      |                |
|------------------------------|----------------------|------|----------------|-------------------|------|----------------|
| Shifts                       | Day/Night            |      |                | Day/Night         |      |                |
| Grade                        | Posts Available      |      | Posts Unfilled | Posts Available   |      | Posts Unfilled |
|                              | HC                   | WTE  | WTE            | HC                | WTE  | WTE            |
| Band 7                       | 1                    | 1.0  | 0.0            | 1                 | 1.0  | 0.0            |
| Band 6                       | 8                    | 6.1  | 0.0            | 8                 | 7.2  | 0.0            |
| Band 5                       | 39                   | 34.9 | 0.0            | 28                | 22.7 | 0.0            |
| Band 3                       | 4                    | 3.4  | 0.0            | 2                 | 1.8  | 0.2            |
| Band 2                       | 9                    | 6.9  | 0.0            | 2                 | 2.0  | 0.2            |
| Emergency Nurse Practitioner | 4                    | 3.3  | 0.0            | 2                 | 1.3  | 0.4            |

**Notes:**

- The headcount and WTE of staff available to be allocated to day/night shift is indicative. Exact numbers of staff allocated to day/night shift is difficult to detail in this format as there are various twilight shifts utilised and therefore cannot be clearly defined as day/night shifts.
- An additional 7 (6 WTE) nurses have been recruited for Antrim Emergency Department and are due to take up post soon.

**South Eastern Trust area Accident and Emergency Units****Doctors**

| Hospital                                   | Downe Hospital  |     |                | Lagan Valley                        |     |                |
|--|-----------------|-----|----------------|-------------------------------------|-----|----------------|
| Opening hours                              | 8am-10pm        |     |                | 9am-8pm (Unit staffed 9am-Midnight) |     |                |
| Grade                                      | Posts Available |     | Posts Unfilled | Posts Available                     |     | Posts Unfilled |
|  | HC              | WTE | WTE            | HC                                  | WTE | WTE            |
| Consultant                                 | 1               | 1.0 | 0.0            | 2                                   | 1.7 | 0.0            |
| Associate Specialist                       | 1               | 1.0 | 0.0            |                                     |     |                |
| Staff Grade                                |                 |     |                | 4                                   | 4.0 | 1.0            |
| Specialty Doctor                           | 6               | 6.0 | 1.8            |                                     |     |                |
| Fixed Term Specialty Training Appointments |                 |     |                | 4                                   | 4.0 | 4.0            |
| Foundation House Officer 2                 |                 |     |                | 2                                   | 2.0 | 0.0            |

| Hospital             | Ulster Hospital |     |                |                                 |            |                |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----|----------------|---------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Shift                | Day Shift       |     |                | Night Shift                     |            |                |
| Grade                | Posts Available |     | Posts Unfilled | Posts Available                 |            | Posts Unfilled |
|                      | HC              | WTE | WTE            | HC                              | WTE        | WTE            |
| Consultant           | 2               | 2.0 | 0.0            | 1 (until 10pm)                  | 1.0        | 0.0            |
| Middle Grade Doctors | 4               | 4.0 | 0.0            | 2 (until 10pm)<br>1 (until 3am) | 2.0<br>1.0 | 0.0<br>0.0     |

| Hospital             | Ulster Hospital |     |                |                    |     |                |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----|----------------|--------------------|-----|----------------|
| Shift                | Day Shift       |     |                | Night Shift        |     |                |
| Grade                | Posts Available |     | Posts Unfilled | Posts Available    |     | Posts Unfilled |
|                      | HC              | WTE | WTE            | HC                 | WTE | WTE            |
| Junior Grade Doctors | 3               | 3.0 | 0.0            | 3 (until midnight) | 3.0 | 0.0            |
|                      |                 |     |                | 2 (overnight)      | 2.0 | 0.0            |

**Nurses**

| Hospital      | Downe Hospital |         | Lagan Valley                        |         | Ulster Hospital |         |
|---------------|----------------|---------|-------------------------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|
| Opening hours | 8am-10pm       |         | 9am-8pm (Unit staffed 9am-Midnight) |         | 24 Hours        |         |
| Shift         | Qualified      | Support | Qualified                           | Support | Qualified       | Support |
| Morning       | 4              | 2       | 4                                   | 2       | 13              | 2       |
| Afternoon     | 5              | 2       | 5                                   | 2       | 13              | 2       |
| Evening       | 4              | 2       | 4                                   | 2       | 13              | 2       |
| Night         | 2              | 0       | 2                                   | 0       | 11              | 2       |

**Note:**

- 1 Figures have been provided for staff on each shift only and not for total staff in post.
- 2 Any vacancies in the workforce are currently being progressed with Human Resources Recruitment Team. Vacancies within the rota are covered with bank / agency staff.

**Southern Trust area Accident and Emergency Units****Doctors**

| Hospital         | Craigavon Area Hospital |     |                | Daisy Hill Hospital |     |                |
|------------------|-------------------------|-----|----------------|---------------------|-----|----------------|
| Shifts           | Day/Night               |     |                | Day/Night           |     |                |
| Grade            | Posts Available         |     | Posts Unfilled | Posts Available     |     | Posts Unfilled |
|                  | HC                      | WTE | WTE            | HC                  | WTE | WTE            |
| Consultant       | 8                       | 8.0 | 0.0            | 2                   | 2.0 | 0.0            |
| Middle Grade     | 6                       | 6.0 | 1.0            | 2                   | 2.0 | 0.0            |
| GP Practitioners | 0                       | 0.0 | 0.0            | 5                   | 3.0 | 0.0            |
| Junior Grade     | 9                       | 9.0 | 1.0            | 5                   | 5.0 | 1.0            |

**Notes:**

- 1 At Craigavon Area Hospital, weekday day shift is covered by 3 Consultants, 3 Middle Grade doctors and 4 Junior Grade Doctors, with one Consultant on shift at weekends. Night shift is covered by 1 Consultant until 10pm, 3 Middle Grade doctors until 10pm (with one Middle Grade Doctor until midnight) and 2 Junior Grade Doctors.
- 2 At Daisy Hill Hospital, day shift is covered by 2 Consultants, 1 Middle Grade doctor, 2 GP Practitioners and 2 Junior Grade Doctors. Night shift is covered by 1 Consultant until 10pm weekdays and until 2pm weekends (with Consultant on-call cover outside of these hours), 1 Middle Grade doctor until 10pm (alternate with Consultant), 1 GP Practitioner until 10pm and 1 Junior Grade Doctor.

**Nurses**

| Hospital | Craigavon Area Hospital |      |                | Daisy Hill Hospital |      |                |
|----------|-------------------------|------|----------------|---------------------|------|----------------|
| Shifts   | Day/Night               |      |                | Day/Night           |      |                |
| Grade    | Posts Available         |      | Posts Unfilled | Posts Available     |      | Posts Unfilled |
|          | HC                      | WTE  | WTE            | HC                  | WTE  | WTE            |
| Band 7   | 4                       | 3.8  | 0.0            | 3                   | 2.9  | 0.0            |
| Band 6   | 8                       | 7.0  | 0.0            | 0                   | 0.0  | 0.0            |
| Band 5   | 51                      | 42.3 | 4.0            | 23                  | 16.0 | 0.0            |
| Band 3   | 11                      | 9.0  | 0.0            | 5                   | 4.3  | 0.0            |

**Notes:**

- Nursing staff within the Emergency Department work on a rotational basis through night and day shifts. Any vacant posts are filled through the Trust Nurse bank system.
- At Craigavon Area Hospital, morning shift is covered by 2 Band 7 nurses, 2 Band 6 nurses, 10 Band 5 nurses and 2 Band 3 nurse support. Afternoon and evening shifts have an extra 2 Band 5 nurses. Night shift is covered by 1 Band 6 nurse, 6 Band 5 nurses and 1 Band 3 nurse support. Three of the Band 7 nurses are Emergency Nurse Practitioners, with the other being the ward manager who works Monday to Friday.

At Daisy Hill Hospital, there are 5 nurses on duty most mornings, with 8 nurses on shift in the afternoon and 4 nurses on duty in the evening from 17:00 hours to 21:

- 00 hours. There are less nursing staff on duty at weekends. One of the Band 7 nurses is an Emergency Nurse Practitioner, with the other being the ward manager who works Monday to Friday.

**Western Trust area Accident and Emergency Units****Doctors**

| Hospital                     | Altnagelvin Hospital |     |                | Erne Hospital   |     |                |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-----|----------------|-----------------|-----|----------------|
| Shifts                       | Day/Night            |     |                | Day/Night       |     |                |
| Grade                        | Posts Available      |     | Posts Unfilled | Posts Available |     | Posts Unfilled |
|                              | HC                   | WTE | WTE            | HC              | WTE | WTE            |
| Consultant                   | 4                    | 3.1 | 0.5            | 3               | 3.0 | 1.0            |
| Associate Specialist         | 1                    | 1.0 | 0.0            | 1               | 1.0 | 0.0            |
| Staff Grade/Specialty Doctor | 2                    | 2.0 | 1.0            | 6               | 6.0 | 6.0            |
| Trust Grade                  | 2                    | 1.8 | 0.0            |                 |     |                |
| Specialty Registrar          | 4                    | 4.0 | 1.0            | 1               | 1.0 | 1.0            |
| GP Registrar ST2             | 3                    | 3.0 | 0.0            |                 |     |                |
| Foundation Year 2            | 3                    | 3.0 | 0.0            |                 |     |                |

**Notes:**

- At Altnagelvin Hospital, locums are currently covering the Junior and Middle Grade vacancies. Two Consultants are on duty between 9am and 5pm and on call from 5pm and 9am.
- At Erne Hospital, a Consultant post is currently being covered by a full-time long-term locum, 2 of the Specialty Doctor posts are being covered by full-time long-term locums, with the other 4 Specialty Doctor posts and the Specialty Trainee post being covered by locums on an "ad-hoc" basis. On weekdays, Consultants are on duty between 9am and 10pm and a Consultant or Associate Specialist is on call from 10pm and 9am on weekdays and on call at weekends.

**Nurses**

| <b>Hospital</b>                     | <b>Altnagelvin Hospital</b> |            |                       |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----------------------|
|                                     | <b>Day/Night shift</b>      |            |                       |
|                                     | <b>Posts Available</b>      |            | <b>Posts Unfilled</b> |
| <b>Grade</b>                        | <b>HC</b>                   | <b>WTE</b> | <b>WTE</b>            |
| Band 8a                             | 1                           | 1.0        | 0.0                   |
| Band 7 Emergency Nurse Practitioner | 5                           | 4.3        | 0.0                   |
| Band 6                              | 5                           | 5.0        | 0.0                   |
| Band 5                              | 26                          | 24.3       | 1.3                   |
| Band 2/3                            | 7                           | 6.6        | 1.1                   |

**Note:**

- 1 At Altnagelvin Hospital nursing staff rotate from day to night duty. Day shift is covered by 1 Band 8a, 2 Band 7 Emergency Nurse Practitioners, 1 Band 6, 6 Band 5 Nurses; and 2 Band 2/3 Nurse Support staff. Night Shift is covered by 1 Band 6, 4 Band 5 Nurses; and 1 Band 2 Nurse Support staff.

**Nurses**

| <b>Hospital</b>                     | <b>Erne Hospital</b> |                    |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
|                                     | <b>Day shift</b>     | <b>Night Shift</b> |
| Band 8a                             | 0                    | 0                  |
| Band 7 Emergency Nurse Practitioner | 1                    | 0                  |
| Band 6                              | 1                    | 0                  |
| Band 5                              | 4                    | 3                  |
| Band 2/3                            | 1                    | 1                  |

**Note:**

- 1 Figures for Erne Hospital relate to staff on each shift only and not to total staff in post.
- 2 At the Erne Hospital, one of the day shift band 5 nurses, one of the night shift band 5 nurses and the night shift health care worker are in addition to the funded nursing staff. These shifts are covered by bank staff.
- 3 A review of the nursing workforce for the new South West Acute Hospital Emergency Department is currently in progress.

**Ambulances: Downtime Statistics**

**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 9768/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** For the purposes of this question, ambulance downtime has been taken to refer to the turnaround time measured from when an ambulance arrives at an A&E department until it has 'cleared' the location. This includes patient handover to relevant clinical personnel and making the vehicle ready for the next call.

Ambulance turnaround times during February 2012 are as follows:

| HSC Trust Area | Hospital/Site Attended           | Within 15 mins | Between 15 and 30 mins | Between 30 and 45 mins | Greater than 45 mins | Total |
|----------------|----------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------|
| Belfast        | Royal Victoria                   | 164            | 660                    | 824                    | 707                  | 2355  |
|                | Mater Infirmorum                 | 122            | 382                    | 242                    | 83                   | 829   |
|                | Belfast City Hospital            | 90             | 343                    | 222                    | 56                   | 711   |
|                | R/Belf For Sick Children         | 74             | 99                     | 22                     | 9                    | 204   |
|                | Royal Jubilee Maternity          | 23             | 20                     | 6                      | 6                    | 55    |
|                | Musgrave Park                    | 4              | 10                     | 0                      | 0                    | 14    |
|                | Northern Ireland Cancer Centre   | 5              | 2                      | 5                      | 1                    | 13    |
|                | Knockbracken Healthcare Park     | 6              | 3                      | 0                      | 0                    | 9     |
|                | Forster Green                    | 2              | 1                      | 0                      | 0                    | 3     |
|                | Belfast International Airport    | 0              | 1                      | 0                      | 0                    | 1     |
| Northern       | Antrim Area Hospital             | 238            | 770                    | 440                    | 166                  | 1614  |
|                | Causeway Hospital                | 249            | 346                    | 73                     | 11                   | 679   |
|                | Holywell                         | 8              | 0                      | 1                      | 0                    | 9     |
|                | Muckamore Abbey                  | 5              | 1                      | 1                      | 0                    | 7     |
|                | Dalriada Hospital, Ballycastle   | 1              | 2                      | 0                      | 0                    | 3     |
|                | Mid-Ulster, Magherafelt          | 1              | 0                      | 1                      | 0                    | 2     |
| South Eastern  | Ulster Hospital                  | 115            | 465                    | 678                    | 550                  | 1808  |
|                | Downe Hospital                   | 72             | 140                    | 29                     | 5                    | 246   |
|                | Lagan Valley Hospital            | 35             | 111                    | 58                     | 39                   | 243   |
|                | Ards Hospital                    | 2              | 2                      | 0                      | 0                    | 4     |
|                | Bangor Hospital                  | 2              | 0                      | 1                      | 0                    | 3     |
|                | Downshire Hospital               | 0              | 1                      | 0                      | 0                    | 1     |
|                | Lagan Valley GU                  | 0              | 1                      | 0                      | 0                    | 1     |
|                | Ulster Hospital GU               | 0              | 1                      | 0                      | 0                    | 1     |
| Southern       | South Tyrone Hospital, Dungannon | 1              | 2                      | 0                      | 0                    | 3     |
|                | Lurgan Hospital                  | 1              | 1                      | 0                      | 0                    | 2     |
|                | St John's House, Newry           | 2              | 0                      | 0                      | 0                    | 2     |
|                | Craigavon Area Hospital          | 270            | 694                    | 292                    | 279                  | 1535  |
|                | Daisyhill Newry                  | 181            | 302                    | 81                     | 56                   | 620   |
|                | St Luke's, Armagh                | 3              | 0                      | 2                      | 0                    | 5     |

| HSC Trust Area | Hospital/Site Attended          | Within 15 mins | Between 15 and 30 mins | Between 30 and 45 mins | Greater than 45 mins | Total        |
|----------------|---------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Western        | Altnagelvin Hospital            | 360            | 612                    | 145                    | 54                   | 1171         |
|                | Erne Hospital Enniskillen       | 197            | 356                    | 44                     | 10                   | 607          |
|                | Tyrone County Hospital Omagh    | 5              | 6                      | 1                      | 2                    | 14           |
|                | Gransha                         | 11             | 1                      | 0                      | 0                    | 12           |
|                | Tyrone Fermanagh Psych Hospital | 8              | 1                      | 0                      | 0                    | 9            |
|                | Omagh General                   | 2              | 0                      | 0                      | 0                    | 2            |
|                | Foyle Hospice                   | 1              | 0                      | 0                      | 0                    | 1            |
|                | <b>Total</b>                    | <b>2260</b>    | <b>5336</b>            | <b>3168</b>            | <b>2034</b>          | <b>12798</b> |

Source: NIAS

### Flu Vaccination: Cost-effectiveness Study

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the cost effectiveness study of seasonal flu vaccination, undertaken by the Public Health Agency, will be published.

(AQW 9810/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** No cost-effectiveness study of seasonal flu vaccination has been carried out by the Public Health Agency, however a study has been completed by the Health Protection Agency (HPA) in England. The study is currently being prepared for publication in peer-reviewed scientific literature. The publication date is not yet known.

### Flu Vaccination: Cost-effectiveness Study

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Public Health Agency's cost effectiveness study of seasonal flu vaccination includes data from Northern Ireland.

(AQW 9811/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** No cost-effectiveness study of seasonal flu vaccination has been carried out by the Public Health Agency, however a study has been completed by the Health Protection Agency (HPA) in England. The study considered the cost-effectiveness of the programme from the perspective of the English National Health Service and did not include data from Northern Ireland.

### Drugs: Admissions to Accident and Emergency Departments

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people under the age of 18 have been admitted to Accident and Emergency Departments as a result of drug abuse in each of the last five years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area

(AQW 9834/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** It is assumed that this question refers to the number of people under the age of 18 who have attended Accident and Emergency Departments as a result of drug abuse in each of the last five years.

The information requested is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

### Alcohol: Admissions to Accident and Emergency Departments

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people under the age of 18 have been admitted to Accident and Emergency Departments as a result of the effects of alcohol in each of the last five years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 9836/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** It is assumed that this question refers to the number of people under the age of 18 who have attended Accident and Emergency Departments as a result of the effects of alcohol in each of the last five years.

The information requested is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.



### Health and Social Care Board: Funding

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what percentage of his Department's funding is allocated to the Health and Social Care Board; (ii) whether the operations of the Health and Social Care Board are outside his Department's remit; and (iii) whether MLAs should direct enquiries about the Health and Social Care Board directly to the Board rather than to his Department.

**(AQW 9848/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:**

- (i) Approximately 88% of my Department's current expenditure budget is allocated to the Health and Social Care Board.
- (ii) Section 2 of The Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (NI) 2009 places a general duty on the Department to promote an integrated system of health and social care. In terms of service commissioning and provision, the Department discharges this duty primarily by delegating the exercise of its statutory functions to the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), the Public Health Agency (PHA) and a number of other HSC Bodies. All of these bodies are accountable to the Department which in turn is accountable, through the Minister, to the Assembly for the manner in which this duty is performed.
- (iii) The organisation to which enquiries should be directed depends on the nature of the enquiry. Whilst MLAs are free to direct enquiries to any public body, any enquiry which requires a Ministerial response should be directed through the Department.

### Pregnancies: Terminations outside Northern Ireland

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an estimate of the number of women with an address in Northern Ireland who had pregnancies terminated outside Northern Ireland in each of the last five financial years.

**(AQW 9850/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** It is not possible to readily provide an estimate on the number of women with an address in Northern Ireland, who had pregnancies terminated outside Northern Ireland in each of the last five financial years.

However, information is available on the number of women with an address in Northern Ireland who had pregnancies terminated in the UK in each of the last five calendar years and is shown below;

| Year | Number of Abortions |
|------|---------------------|
| 2006 | 1,295               |
| 2007 | 1,343               |
| 2008 | 1,173               |
| 2009 | 1,123               |
| 2010 | 1,101               |

**Source:** Department of Health England and Wales

During 2006-2010, there were nine abortions carried out in Scotland where the woman gave an address in Northern Ireland.

**Source:** Information Services Division Scotland

### Family Planning Association: Funding

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which Health and Social Care Trusts have provided funding to the Family Planning Association in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9855/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The information requested is set out in the table below:

| Year      | Health and Social Care Trust              |
|-----------|---|
| 2007/2008 | Belfast; South Eastern; Southern; Western |
| 2008/2009 | Belfast; Western                          |
| 2009/2010 | South Eastern; Southern; Western          |
| 2010/2011 | Belfast; South Eastern; Southern; Western |
| 2011/2012 | Belfast; South Eastern; Southern; Western |

## Ophthalmologists

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many eye consultants, per head of the population, currently practise; and how this figure compares with the rest of the UK.

**(AQW 9856/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Information on the number of eye consultants employed within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care per 100,000 head of population compared with England, Scotland and Wales is given in the table below.

**Number of Eye Consultants (Ophthalmologists) employed within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care per 100,000 Head of Population compared with England, Scotland and Wales (Whole-Time Equivalent) as at 30 September 2011**

| Country            | WTE per 100,000 Population |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Northern Ireland   | 1.69                       |
| England            | 1.84                       |
| Scotland           | 1.96                       |
| Wales <sup>1</sup> | 1.85                       |

### Sources:

Workforce information:

Northern Ireland – Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts

England – The Information Centre for Health and Social Care

Scotland – Information Services Division, Scotland

Wales – StatsWales

Mid-Year Population Estimate information (latest available - at 2010):

Northern Ireland – Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

England – Office for National Statistics

Scotland – General Register Office for Scotland

Wales – StatsWales

### Notes:

1 Workforce information for Wales is at September 2010.

## Nurse:Patient Ratio

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the ratio of nurses to patients in each hospital.

**(AQW 9857/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** There is no single applicable ratio of nurses to patients. The clinical need of the individual determines the appropriate treatment and care and the levels of nursing, medical or social care intervention.

## Diabetes: Insulin Pump Waiting List

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people with Type 1 diabetes are on a waiting list for an insulin pump or consumables for the pump in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

**(AQW 9860/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** As these figures are not available centrally within my Department, Tables 1 and 2 below detail the information supplied on request by each HSC Trust in reply to your questions relating to waiting lists, and insulin pumps and consumables provided in each of the last three years.

It should be noted with regard to the waiting lists (Table 1) not everyone on the list may have been assessed against the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) criteria.

**Table 1: Number of people with Type 1 Diabetes on a waiting list for an Insulin Pump or Consumables in each HSC Trust area as at 23 March 2012**

| Health and Social Care Trust | Number on Waiting List |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Belfast                      | 40                     |

| Health and Social Care Trust | Number on Waiting List |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Northern <sup>2</sup>        | N/A                    |
| South Eastern <sup>3</sup>   | 32                     |
| Southern <sup>4</sup>        | 49                     |
| Western <sup>5</sup>         | 75                     |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>196</b>             |

- 1 Figures provided by HSC Trusts in reply to this question have not been validated by the DHSSPS.
- 2 The Northern Trust advised that as an insulin pump service is under development there is no current waiting list, and that 25 patients have expressed an interest in commencing on insulin pumps subject to clinical assessment.
- 3 There are no adults currently waiting for an insulin pump or consumables.
- 4 Numbers are split between 31 adult and 18 paediatric patients.
- 5 Numbers are split between 50 adult and 25 paediatric patients.

**Table 2: Number of Insulin Pumps and Consumables each HSC Trust has provided for people in each of the last three years<sup>6,7</sup>**

| Health and Social Care Trusts | 2010      | 2011       | 2012       |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Belfast <sup>8</sup>          | 15        | 30         | 45         |
| Northern <sup>9</sup>         | 26        | 33         | 35         |
| South Eastern <sup>10</sup>   | 7         | 27         | 42         |
| Southern                      | 22        | 32         | 42         |
| Western                       | 29        | 44         | 47         |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>99</b> | <b>166</b> | <b>211</b> |

- 6 Figures provided by HSC Trusts in reply to this question have not been validated by the DHSSPS. It has been assumed that data for 2010 and 2011 relates to year ending 31 March, and to 23 March for 2012.
- 7 Patients receive consumables on an ongoing basis, with replacement pumps provided every four to five years depending upon the manufacturer.
- 8 The Belfast Trust allocated 10 insulin pumps to new patients each year and 5 insulin pumps were used as replacements.
- 9 Adult patients in the Northern Trust receive insulin pump consumables from the Mid-Ulster Hospital.
- 10 The South Eastern Trust started 29 children on insulin pumps over the past three years, with 3 replacement pumps issued. They have started 10 adults on insulin pumps as part of a pilot programme.

### Diabetes: Insulin Pump Provision

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are any inconsistencies in the Health and Social Care Trusts' policies on the provision of insulin pumps and consumables for people with diabetes.

**(AQW 9861/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** In June 2009 my Department endorsed for implementation in the HSC the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence's (NICE) Technology Appraisal No. 151 which sets out recommendations on the use of insulin pump therapy. Details of the NICE guidance can be found at [www.guidance.nice.org.uk/TA151/PublicInfo/doc/English](http://www.guidance.nice.org.uk/TA151/PublicInfo/doc/English). This guidance applies to all Health and Social Care Trusts and the HSC has made significant progress towards fully implementing the guidance. Consumables are provided free of cost to the patient where insulin pump therapy is provided by the HSC; arrangements for the supply of consumables are a matter for individual Trusts, who will advise patients of their local arrangements.

### Diabetes: Insulin Pump Consumables

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) which Health and Social Care Trusts currently provide consumables for insulin pumps for people with diabetes; and (ii) what plans there are to ensure that this is the case in each Trust.

**(AQW 9862/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** All Health and Social Care Trusts with the exception of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust provide consumables for insulin pumps where the pump has been provided by the HSC.

### Diabetes: Insulin Pump Consumables

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how many insulin pumps and consumables each Health and Social Care Trust has provided for people with diabetes in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 9863/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** As these figures are not available centrally within my Department, Tables 1 and 2 below detail the information supplied on request by each HSC Trust in reply to your questions relating to waiting lists, and insulin pumps and consumables provided in each of the last three years.

It should be noted with regard to the waiting lists (Table 1) not everyone on the list may have been assessed against the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) criteria.

**Table 1: Number of people with Type 1 Diabetes on a waiting list for an Insulin Pump or Consumables in each HSC Trust area as at 23 March 2012<sup>1</sup>**

| Health and Social Care Trust | Number on Waiting List |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Belfast                      | 40                     |
| Northern <sup>2</sup>        | N/A                    |
| South Eastern <sup>3</sup>   | 32                     |
| Southern <sup>4</sup>        | 49                     |
| Western <sup>5</sup>         | 75                     |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>196</b>             |

- 11 Figures provided by HSC Trusts in reply to this question have not been validated by the DHSSPS.
- 12 The Northern Trust advised that as an insulin pump service is under development there is no current waiting list, and that 25 patients have expressed an interest in commencing on insulin pumps subject to clinical assessment.
- 13 There are no adults currently waiting for an insulin pump or consumables.
- 14 Numbers are split between 31 adult and 18 paediatric patients.
- 15 Numbers are split between 50 adult and 25 paediatric patients.

**Table 2: Number of Insulin Pumps and Consumables each HSC Trust has provided for people in each of the last three years<sup>6,7</sup>**

| Health and Social Care Trusts | 2010      | 2011       | 2012       |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Belfast <sup>8</sup>          | 15        | 30         | 45         |
| Northern <sup>9</sup>         | 26        | 33         | 35         |
| South Eastern <sup>10</sup>   | 7         | 27         | 42         |
| Southern                      | 22        | 32         | 42         |
| Western                       | 29        | 44         | 47         |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>99</b> | <b>166</b> | <b>211</b> |

- 16 Figures provided by HSC Trusts in reply to this question have not been validated by the DHSSPS. It has been assumed that data for 2010 and 2011 relates to year ending 31 March, and to 23 March for 2012.
- 17 Patients receive consumables on an ongoing basis, with replacement pumps provided every four to five years depending upon the manufacturer.
- 18 The Belfast Trust allocated 10 insulin pumps to new patients each year and 5 insulin pumps were used as replacements.
- 19 Adult patients in the Northern Trust receive insulin pump consumables from the Mid-Ulster Hospital.
- 20 The South Eastern Trust started 29 children on insulin pumps over the past three years, with 3 replacement pumps issued. They have started 10 adults on insulin pumps as part of a pilot programme.

### Fire and Rescue Service: Surrendered Funding

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has surrendered funding to his Department in this financial year; (ii) the reasons for any such funding not being used; (iii)

whether any surrendered funding was reallocated to other Departments; and (iv) whether the amount of surrendered funding will have an effect on the level of funding allocated to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service in the next financial year.

**(AQW 9870/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I can confirm that: (i) the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) surrendered £2.5m to the Department in 2011/12; (ii) the reduced expenditure relates to a range of areas, including a reduced number of retained firefighter operational call outs, staffing and community development; (iii) the resources were not reallocated to other Departments; and (iv) I am currently considering the NIFRS budget for future years.

### **Fire Stations: Newbuilds**

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether the current programme of new builds for fire stations will continue without delay; and (ii) for how long a business case for a new build fire station remains valid.

**(AQW 9871/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:**

- (i) In light of the constraints faced by NIFRS and taking account of their other needs, the Service has reviewed its capital programme and identified the replacement of Omagh and Dunmurry fire stations and the refurbishment of Rathfriland as top estates priorities. The other main capital priorities for the Service are in respect of red fleet, vehicles and ICT.
- (ii) In line with DFP guidance, project implementation is expected to proceed within 24 months of the timescale indicated in an approved business case. It is a standard condition of business case approval that, where this is not going to occur, my Department, and in appropriate cases DFP, must be notified to agree appropriate further action.

### **IVF Treatment: Availability to Lesbian Couples**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when and why a change was made to the availability of IVF treatment to allow lesbian couples to avail of the publicly funded service.

**(AQW 9880/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Publicly funded fertility services are, and always have been, available to couples, including same sex couples, who have a medical cause for infertility. Those with a diagnosed cause of infertility can access the services immediately; those with an unexplained cause must have been actively trying to conceive for a period of three years.

I will give consideration to reviewing the access criteria for fertility services when NICE publishes revised guidance in July 2012.

Information on the number of same sex couples who have received publicly funded IVF treatment in Northern Ireland is not available.

### **IVF Treatment: Availability to Lesbian Couples**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to review the availability of publicly funded IVF treatment for lesbian couples.

**(AQW 9881/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Publicly funded fertility services are, and always have been, available to couples, including same sex couples, who have a medical cause for infertility. Those with a diagnosed cause of infertility can access the services immediately; those with an unexplained cause must have been actively trying to conceive for a period of three years.

I will give consideration to reviewing the access criteria for fertility services when NICE publishes revised guidance in July 2012.

Information on the number of same sex couples who have received publicly funded IVF treatment in Northern Ireland is not available.

### **IVF Treatment: Uptake by Lesbian Couples**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many lesbian couples have received publicly funded IVF treatment since 2009.

**(AQW 9882/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Publicly funded fertility services are, and always have been, available to couples, including same sex couples, who have a medical cause for infertility. Those with a diagnosed cause of infertility can access the services immediately; those with an unexplained cause must have been actively trying to conceive for a period of three years.

I will give consideration to reviewing the access criteria for fertility services when NICE publishes revised guidance in July 2012.

Information on the number of same sex couples who have received publicly funded IVF treatment in Northern Ireland is not available.

### **Prostate Cancer: Zytiga Availability**

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the prostate cancer drug Zytiga is available; and if not, to detail the reasons why.

**(AQW 9883/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I can advise that the prostate cancer Zytiga (Abiraterone), whilst not currently approved by NICE, can be accessed by patients in Northern Ireland through the Individual Funding Request (IFR) process if their consultant considers the drug to be of benefit to them. All cases are dealt with on an individual basis and considered on its merits.

NICE published a draft technology appraisal on 1st February 2012 which does not recommend the use of Zytiga. This guidance has now been issued for consultation. NICE is due to publish the final guidance in June 2012; however this date may change should any revisions to the guidance be required as a result of the consultation.

### Prostate Cancer: Zytiga Availability

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the prostate cancer drug Zytiga will become available. **(AQW 9884/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I can advise that the prostate cancer Zytiga (Abiraterone), whilst not currently approved by NICE, can be accessed by patients in Northern Ireland through the Individual Funding Request (IFR) process if their consultant considers the drug to be of benefit to them. All cases are dealt with on an individual basis and considered on its merits.

NICE published a draft technology appraisal on 1st February 2012 which does not recommend the use of Zytiga. This guidance has now been issued for consultation. NICE is due to publish the final guidance in June 2012; however this date may change should any revisions to the guidance be required as a result of the consultation.

### Obesity: Young Children

**Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to tackle obesity in young children.

**(AQW 9888/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** My Department launched the Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022: A Fitter Future for All on 9th March 2012. This Framework aims to tackle the issue of overweight and obesity throughout the entire life course of the population and has a target specifically for children which is a 3% reduction of obesity and 2% reduction of overweight and obesity in children by 2022 (the target is in two parts; the proportion that are obese and the proportion that are overweight and obese).

Specific outcomes contained in the Framework which will work towards meeting this target include:

- Initiatives and programmes on nutrition and physical activity within all Early Years settings reviewed.
- Health and Social Care Professionals identify, and provide appropriate interventions or signposting, for young children who are, or are at-risk of overweight/obesity.
- New Breastfeeding Strategy in place and being implemented.
- Early Years settings supported to comply with the nutritional guidelines requirements outlined in the minimum standards for childcare providers.
- Increase practical skills, awareness and knowledge to enable young children and their parents/carers to make healthy choices.
- Implementation plan published to deliver the aims and objectives of the Play and Leisure Policy Statement.
- Children and families have access to safe facilities for play and physical activity in their locality, particularly in areas of deprivation.

Implementation of the non-departmental outcomes within the Framework will be taken forward by the Public Health Agency who already provide a wide variety of programmes, projects and initiatives to address the issue of overweight and obesity throughout the life course, including in Early Years and Children, throughout Northern Ireland. This work can be summarised in seven key areas:

- a) Give children a healthy start in life;
- b) Improve community access to healthy affordable food;
- c) Provide healthy food choices when outside the home;
- d) Provide opportunities to be physically active;
- e) Give adults, caregivers and children information and skills on nutrition and physical activity;
- f) Give key professional groups the information and skills they need to support individuals and groups they work with; and,
- g) Assist Government Departments and local government to develop policies and guidelines to provide a context for change

### Meals on Wheels: Costs

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what is the cost of a two-course meal provided by the Meals on Wheels Service in each Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) whether any of the Trusts are deviating from the £1.50 cost stipulated by the Department; and if so, to detail the reasons why.

**(AQW 9894/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The delivery and design of the community meals service varies from Trust to Trust therefore the information on costs in each Trust area is not available in the format requested. The table below outlines the range of costs of meal provision as well as charges to the service user in each Trust.

| Trust                | Costs<br>£  | Charge      |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Belfast <sup>1</sup> | -           | 1.50        |
| Northern             | 4.76        | 1.50 - 2.20 |
| Southern             | 4.57 – 5.39 | 1.50        |
| South Eastern        | 4.91        | 2           |
| Western              | 2.60 – 5.00 | 1.40 - 4.25 |

1 Belfast Trust was unable to provide information on unit costs due to the range of variable costs involved.

My Department has written to the Chief Executive of each of the HSC Trusts to seek assurance regarding compliance with the Departmental Circular on charging, or to specify when they will bring their charging practice into compliance. All Trusts have now confirmed either current compliance with the Circular or compliance from 1st May 2102 at the latest.

### GPs: Average Salary

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average salary of a G.P.  
(AQW 9897/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** The most recent information available from the NHS Information Centre report on GP Earnings and Expenses relates to 2009/10 and indicates the average income of a GP contractor in Northern Ireland was £91,400 before tax.

### Pain Management: Spend

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much each Health and Social Care Trust spent on inpatient and outpatient pain management services in each of the last five years.

(AQW 9899/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** Pain management services are provided across inpatient, outpatient and daycase settings within each trust. Total expenditure for each trust for the Pain Management Speciality over the past five years was as follows:

| Financial Year | Pain Management Specialty -Total Annual Expenditure |                    |                         |                    |                   |           |
|----------------|---|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------|
|                | Belfast HSC Trust                                   | Northern HSC Trust | South Eastern HSC Trust | Southern HSC Trust | Western HSC Trust | Total     |
|                | £   | £                  | £                       | £                  | £                 | £         |
| 2010-11        | 1,324,513   | 1,410,419          | 715,311                 | 1,031,854          | 837,517           | 5,319,613 |
| 2009-10        | 1,552,841   | 967,038            | 739,382                 | 986,035            | 613,516           | 4,858,813 |
| 2008-09        | 1,722,125   | 1,021,542          | 768,838                 | 961,468            | 565,541           | 5,039,513 |
| 2007-08        | 1,482,021   | 818,250            | 615,663                 | 865,441            | 312,703           | 4,103,078 |
| 2006-07        | 1,096,323   | 697,418            | 567,628                 | 620,446            | 245,336           | 3,227,150 |

**Note:** the provision of pain management services is inherent within and across other specialties and in that context, expenditure will be higher than that noted above. It is not possible to separately extract such information.

### Pain Management: Hospital Admissions

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the sustained increase in the number of hospital admissions for pain management in the last ten years.

(AQW 9900/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** A number of specialist pain management clinics are provided by the HSC Trusts and GPs can refer patients to these clinics where they feel that their current pain management treatment is proving ineffective.

“Transforming Your Care” the report of the HSC Review, acknowledges the increasing prevalence of long term conditions in Northern Ireland such as chronic pain and sets out a series of proposals for improving services, including partnership working

with patients to enable greater self care and prevention, personalised care pathways and integration of services across the community, primary and secondary care settings.

The Department has developed a policy framework for adults living with long term conditions. The framework will support commissioners and providers in developing and improving services. It is also intended to be a useful source of reference for people who live with long term conditions, setting out the services they and their carers should expect.

The policy framework will be launched in April 2012.

## Smoking

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an estimate of the number of smokers in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 9913/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Information on the number of smokers is not available; however, information is available on the proportion of the Northern Ireland population who indicated that they smoked. The proportion of smokers in Northern Ireland aged 16 or over is tabled below:

### Smoking prevalence in Northern Ireland

| Year <sup>1, 2</sup> | Percent |
|----------------------|---------|
| 2000/01              | 27      |
| 2002/03              | 26      |
| 2004/05              | 26      |
| 2006/07              | 25      |
| 2007/08              | 23      |
| 2008/09              | 24      |
| 2009/10              | 24      |
| 2010/11              | 24      |

- 1 Data up to 2009/10 are taken from the Continuous Household Survey. Data for 2010/11 are taken from the Health Survey for Northern Ireland.
- 2 The Continuous Household Survey was carried out biennially up to 2004/05. From 2006/07, the survey was carried out annually.

## Smoking: Packaging on Tobacco Products

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there is any evidence to suggest that plain packaging on tobacco products would have an impact on the number of people smoking.

**(AQW 9914/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** A number of studies on the impact of plain packaging on smoking behaviour have been carried out in countries such as Scotland, Canada and New Zealand. Results from these studies have indicated that plain packaging reduces the appeal of tobacco products to both children and adults, as compared with branded packs.

The studies also revealed that those using plain packs felt more negative about smoking and reported behaviours such as: wanting to keep the packs out of sight of others; smoking less around others; thinking more about quitting; and actively wanting to quit. Research which compared the appeal of tobacco packaging for children with that of adults, found that younger participants were more affected by plain packaging.

As no country has yet introduced plain packaging for tobacco products, the evidence on whether and to what extent it would influence smoking behaviour is indirect. However, I believe that the results of studies carried out to date provide sufficient evidence to warrant Northern Ireland's participation in a UK-wide consultation on this issue.

## IVF Treatment: Sex Selection

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are in place to prevent sex selection in publicly funded IVF treatment.

**(AQW 9916/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Under the provisions of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the subject matter of The Human Fertilisation and Embryology (HFE) Act 1990 (amended by the HFE Act 2008) is a reserved matter. The HFE Act 1990, prohibits any practice designed to



secure that any resulting child will be of one sex rather than the other except; in a case where there is a particular risk that any resulting child will have or develop –

- (i) a gender-related serious physical or mental disability,
- (ii) a gender-related serious illness, or
- (iii) any other gender-related serious medical condition

### **IVF Treatment: Destruction of Human Embryos**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures and guidelines govern the destruction of human embryos in relation to publicly funded IVF treatment.  
**(AQW 9918/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Under the provisions of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 fertilisation and embryology are reserved matters. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology (HFE) Act 1990 (amended by the HFE Act 2008), regulates creation, keeping and use of embryos outside the human body and storage and use of gametes to create embryos.

### **Away-days and Team-building Exercises: Cost-effectiveness**

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department assesses the cost-effectiveness of awaydays and team-building exercises.  
**(AQW 9946/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** My Department assesses the cost effectiveness of away-days and team building exercises by evaluating the impact of the activity against the achievement of business objectives and by monitoring the cost of each activity to ensure that it offers value for money.

### **Alcohol: Admissions to Accident and Emergency Departments**

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people who were under the influence of alcohol have presented in each Accident and Emergency Department in the last year (i) in total; and (ii) during weekends.  
**(AQW 9952/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The information requested is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

### **Accident and Emergency Departments: PSNI Call-outs**

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on how many occasions the PSNI have been called to each Accident and Emergency Department in the last year as a result of (i) verbal abuse; and (ii) physical assault of staff or patients by another patient.  
**(AQW 9953/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Information on the number of occasions the PSNI were called to each Accident and Emergency (A&E) department in the last year as a result of (i) verbal abuse; and (ii) physical assault of staff or patients by another patient is not available, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

However, information is available on the number of times the PSNI attended an incident of verbal or physical abuse against staff in each hospital; although, it should be noted that this information relates to all hospital attendances and not specifically to emergency care departments.

The table below presents information on the number of times the PSNI have attended an incident of verbal or physical abuse against staff in those hospitals which have an emergency care department, between 1st October 2010 and 30th September 2011.

**Table 1 - Number of times the PSNI attended an incident of verbal or physical abuse in hospitals (1st October 2010 - 30th September 2011)**

| <b>Hospital</b>          | <b>Verbal Incident</b> | <b>Physical Incident</b> | <b>Total Incidents</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Belfast City             | 10                     | 30                       | 40                     |
| Mater                    | 13                     | 8                        | 21                     |
| Royal Group of Hospitals | 19                     | 18                       | 37                     |
| Antrim Area              | 3                      | 7                        | 10                     |
| Causeway                 | 3                      | 6                        | 9                      |
| Whiteabbey               | 0                      | 0                        | 0                      |
| Mid Ulster               | 0                      | 0                        | 0                      |

| Hospital           | Verbal Incident | Physical Incident | Total Incidents |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Ards               | 1               | 0                 | 1               |
| Ulster             | 1               | 1                 | 2               |
| Bangor             | 0               | 0                 | 0               |
| Lagan Valley       | 3               | 3                 | 6               |
| Downe              | 0               | 2                 | 2               |
| Armagh & Mullinure | 0               | 0                 | 0               |
| Craigavon Area     | 11              | 13                | 24              |
| Daisyhill          | 9               | 5                 | 14              |
| Altnagelvin        | 3               | 0                 | 3               |
| Erne               | 4               | 2                 | 6               |
| Tyrone County      | 0               | 0                 | 0               |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>80</b>       | <b>95</b>         | <b>175</b>      |

**Source:** HSC Trust Incident Report Forms

### **CPR: Staff Training**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what strategy is in place to train departmental staff in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

**(AQW 9971/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** In line with Health & Safety Regulations, my Department maintains a sufficient number of staff who are trained and qualified as first aiders; this training includes Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

In addition, as the Department also provides Automated External Defibrillator (AED) facilities, a number of staff have specialist training in the use of these facilities and this includes Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

Refresher training is carried out annually.

### **CPR: Public Education**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what strategy is in place to educate the public on the use of Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

**(AQW 9972/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Standard 9 of the Cardiovascular Health and Wellbeing Service Framework requires Health and Social Care professionals to work with schools, workplaces and communities to raise awareness of, and access to, emergency life support skills. The implementation of this standard will mean that many more people will have access to ELS training.

In addition a regional business case application to fund Community Resuscitation Development Officers in each Trust is currently with the Health and Social Care Board for consideration.

### **Myalgic Encephalomyelitis: Treatment/Services**

**Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what treatments and services are available to people with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis.

**(AQW 10000/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The variability of symptoms in patients with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis(ME)/ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) mean that they will need to access different parts of the health service, depending on their specific symptoms and the severity of their condition. The focus on treatment is therefore centred on close co-operation between patients, carers and the relevant health and social care professionals, which is essential to ensure that sufferers obtain the most suitable treatment for their particular needs.

In Northern Ireland treatment, for the most part, is provided by general practitioners; however patients have access to a wide range of treatment and support services in primary, secondary and community care settings, including specialist medical, neurology and mental health services, depending on their individual needs.

Any proposals for new service developments or allocation of resources is a matter for the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), as commissioner of services, to consider.

To date the HSCB has established a commissioning team which will deal with, amongst other things, ME/CFS. I am aware that this team has already met with a number of ME/CFS service user representatives and discussed possible areas for service improvement.

### **Myalgic Encephalomyelitis: Treatment/Services**

**Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to expand the treatments and services available for people with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis.

**(AQW 10001/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The variability of symptoms in patients with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME)/ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) mean that they will need to access different parts of the health service, depending on their specific symptoms and the severity of their condition. The focus on treatment is therefore centred on close co-operation between patients, carers and the relevant health and social care professionals, which is essential to ensure that sufferers obtain the most suitable treatment for their particular needs.

In Northern Ireland treatment, for the most part, is provided by general practitioners; however patients have access to a wide range of treatment and support services in primary, secondary and community care settings, including specialist medical, neurology and mental health services, depending on their individual needs.

Any proposals for new service developments or allocation of resources is a matter for the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), as commissioner of services, to consider.

To date the HSCB has established a commissioning team which will deal with, amongst other things, ME/CFS. I am aware that this team has already met with a number of ME/CFS service user representatives and discussed possible areas for service improvement.

### **Child Protection Register: NEELB**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the percentage of pupils at each school in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area who are currently on the Child Protection Register.

**(AQW 10038/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The figures requested are not available centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Using the latest available mid-year population figures produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency and quarterly child protection statistics for the quarter ending December 2011, it is estimated that 0.3 percent of children aged 5 to 18 were on the Child Protection register in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area.

### **Holywell Hospital, Antrim: Facilities**

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the plans for the upgrade and improvement of the facilities, buildings and grounds at Holywell Hospital, Antrim.

**(AQO 1642/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The Northern HSC Trust in conjunction with the HSC Board and key stakeholders is currently developing proposals for Holywell Hospital. These discussions are at a very early stage and the Trust will be submitting an outline of their plans to my Department for consideration later in the year.

The Trust is also in the process of carrying out refurbishment work to some of the wards at Holywell Hospital to improve the patient environment.

### **Obesity**

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to tackle the problem of obesity.

**(AQO 1643/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** On the 9th March 2012 I launched the Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland, entitled A Fitter Future For All. This cross-government, integrated framework incorporates action on food & nutrition and physical activity to tackle the issue of overweight and obesity throughout the population. The Public Health Agency will play a key role in the Framework's implementation and will lead on the delivery of its non cross-Departmental outcomes.

In addition, I am pleased that the Programme for Government commits us to investing £7.2million in support of the Framework over the next three years.

### **Accident and Emergency Departments: Performance**

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to improve performance at Accident and Emergency Departments.

**(AQO 1644/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The current situation in some of our emergency departments is unacceptable and I expect to see a significant improvement in performance.

I have asked the Health and Social Care Board to provide a robust plan of immediate actions to secure improvement. The Board, working with the Public Health Agency, will establish an Improvement Action Group with immediate effect to ensure that long waiting times are addressed and the patient experience improved. The Group will work with all Trusts in Northern Ireland to secure improvements.

Following the work of the Group I will expect 12 hour breaches in Emergency Departments to occur only in the most rare of circumstances. And consequently, I will be requiring an individual report to be provided on each patient who breaches the 12 hour waiting time target, outlining the reasons why. I will also give further consideration to sanctions for failure to meet the target.

I will continue to meet the HSC Board Chief Executive and senior officials on a very regular basis to be assured progress is made and sustained.

### **Human Trafficking: Detection Skills**

**Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there is specific training for health care professionals and fire service and ambulance crews on identifying the signs of sexual or labour exploitation as a result of human trafficking. **(AQO 1645/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Health care professionals, fire service and ambulance crews receive general training on recognising the signs of physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect, whatever the cause. They are also made aware of procedures for reporting concerns about possible abuse.

### **Stereotactic Ablative Radiotherapy**

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the referral of cancer patients for stereotactic ablative radiotherapy outside Northern Ireland is determined solely at the discretion of the relevant clinician. **(AQO 1646/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The decision to recommend a patient for stereotactic radiotherapy in the first instance is a matter for the clinical judgement of the referring consultant. This will be done on the basis of the patient's clinical condition, the best available evidence on the most appropriate treatment and discussions with the patient on his or her treatment options.

### **HIV: Patient Support**

**Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are currently available to support patients who are diagnosed with Human Immunodeficiency Virus. **(AQO 1647/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The multidisciplinary team at the Regional Centre for HIV care and management based at the Royal Victoria Hospital offers a range of services including ongoing treatment, specialist support and advice, to support patients diagnosed with HIV in Northern Ireland.

In addition, my Department has published a Strategy for the Development of Psychological Therapy Services, which recognises the increasing evidence of the benefits of psychological therapies for people who have chronic illnesses. A policy framework has also been developed which will support commissioners and providers in developing and improving services for adults living with long term conditions.

A range of support services including a telephone helpline, counselling, information services, home support, respite, social events and advocacy services are available through voluntary organisations funded by my Department.

### **Audiology: Standards**

**Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to improve existing audiology standards. **(AQO 1648/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** As our population gets older, and advances are made in digital hearing aid technology, it follows that the demand for audiology services will increase. Faced with these challenges, I have decided to follow the example of our colleagues in Great Britain and begin to develop quality standards for audiology services here, to ensure that the service we provide in the future will continue to be of the highest quality possible, and focused on the needs of the patient.

As a fundamental first step in this process, my Department has asked the Health and Social Care Board to instigate a scoping study, which will look at where we are now in terms of audiology quality standards and make recommendations about where we want to be. They have agreed to report by the end of June 2012.

## Department of Justice

### Thomas Ward: Victim's Rights

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to Thomas Ward who was released from custody after serving a sentence for sexual assault in 2006 (i) why he was permitted to reside close to the victim despite being barred from the area; (ii) why the victim was not informed in advance of his move; and (iii) what are the victim's rights in this matter.

**(AQW 9417/11-15)**

**Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice ):** Conditions attached to the granting of bail are a matter for the Courts.

SOPo prohibitions were already in place to prevent the offender from being within the area where the victim lived or to have any contact with the victim.

### Policing: Areas of Responsibility

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the concerns raised by Matt Baggott on the 16 February 2012 in the Justice Committee which highlighted the ambiguous areas of responsibility in policing between the Executive and the Westminster Government.

**(AQW 9466/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** I endorse the Chief Constable's view that policing is a complex business involving a number of key stakeholders, all of whom have an interest in ensuring the delivery of the best possible policing service. I do not believe that there is ambiguity about respective responsibilities, although there is no doubt that the national security dimension adds complexity.

The PSNI has a role in both excepted and transferred fields. The Chief Constable is accountable to the Policing Board for the exercise of the functions of the Police Service, as set out in the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, and reports to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in respect of the delivery of national security-related objectives, in line with the St Andrews Agreement. Given the role that the Northern Ireland Office has in respect of excepted matters, I meet the Chief Constable and Secretary of State regularly through the Security Interface Meeting.

In recognition of the policing arrangements for Northern Ireland, a Policing Architecture document has been developed with the PSNI and the Policing Board setting out some basic principles governing the inter-relationship between my Department, the PSNI, the Policing Board and the Justice Committee. These have been cast in a draft Protocol on the Policing Architecture which we will shortly be presenting to the Justice Committee for their consideration and approval.

### Chief Constable: Budget

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Justice whether he has any plans to increase the timeframe of the budget of the Chief Constable to facilitate longer-term planning.

**(AQW 9467/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The timeframe for all budgets is set by the Executive and Budget 2011-15 allowed the Chief Constable to develop spending plans for the four year period from 2011-12 to 2014-15. Each year there is the option to revise budgets through monitoring rounds.

### Saulius Petraitis, Vitalijus Petraitis and Audrius Sliogeris: Deportation

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether Saulius Petraitis, Vitalijus Petraitis and Audrius Sliogeris had criminal convictions in their native country prior to the commission of their offences in Northern Ireland in 2006; (ii) if so, were they of a similar nature to those committed in Northern Ireland; and (iii) whether they will be deported upon completion of their respective sentences.

**(AQW 9473/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not hold information relating to previous convictions of foreign national prisoners in their native countries. Decisions on whether these prisoners are deported upon release are matters for the United Kingdom Borders Agency.

### HMP Maghaberry: Fire

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice what caused the fire in the cell in HMP Maghaberry on 29 February 2012; and what was the extent of the damage.

**(AQW 9474/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** On 29 February a prisoner in the Care and Supervision Unit attempted to set alight fire retardant bedding materials. His attempts resulted in smoke being generated in his cell which ignited when the cell door was opened by staff when bringing the prisoner to a safe place. The fire was quickly extinguished by staff using a fire extinguisher.

The cell bedding materials were destroyed with some smoke damage caused. Damage to the cell was minimal and was quickly cleaned with the cell returned to service.

### Sex Offenders: Notification Requirements

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many sex-offenders are currently unable to be located by the relevant monitoring agency; (ii) for how long they have been missing; (iii) what category of sex offender is each person; and (iv) whether warrants have been issued for their arrest.

**(AQW 9475/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Information concerning offenders who have failed to comply with the notification requirements of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

### HMP Maghaberry: Full-body Imaging

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners in HMP Maghaberry are currently in dispute with the Prison Authorities regarding full body searches; and of those, for which crimes were the ten prisoners with the longest sentences convicted.

**(AQW 9482/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** 34 republican separated prisoners are in dispute regarding full body searches. 27 of them are actively engaged in protest action. Of the 34, the crimes of which the ten prisoners with the longest sentences were convicted are as follows:

| Length of Sentence         | Main Offence(s)   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Life (recall from license) | Murder  |
| 25 years                   | Murder  |
| 20 years                   | Attempted murder, possession of a firearm with intent to endanger life  |
| 15 years (3 Prisoners)     | Possessing explosives with intent to endanger life or cause serious injury  |
| 15 years                   | False imprisonment and robbery  |
| 8 years                    | Kidnapping  |
| 6 years                    | Causing an explosion likely to endanger life or cause serious injury  |
| 5 years (4 Prisoners)      | Possession of a firearm with intent to cause fear of violence, attempting to wound with intent to do grievous bodily harm and possession of explosives with intent to endanger life |

### Prisons: Full-body Imaging

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Justice which countries use full-body imaging scanners in prisons.

**(AQW 9526/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** I cannot provide definitive information regarding which countries use Full Body Imaging Scanners in their prisons but as far as I am aware, Millimetre Wave Scanners are in use in prisons in France. Transmission X Ray Equipment is used in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Ecuador, Russia and Singapore, although I am advised it is not used in prisons in any country in Western Europe.

### Kanram Jafar: Arrest Warrant

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether an arrest warrant has been issued for Kanram Jafar; (ii) when it was issued; and (iii) if a warrant has not been issued, to outline the rationale behind this decision.

**(AQW 9531/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** An arrest warrant has not been issued for Kanram Jafar as he is not wanted in connection with any offences in this jurisdiction.

### Bench Warrants: Outstanding

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8086/11-15 and AQW 6826/11-15, why the Assistant Chief Constable's report to the Policing Board stated that there were no warrants outstanding for these offences.

**(AQW 9532/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The contents of reports to the Northern Ireland Policing Board are a matter for the Chief Constable and I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

However, although I am aware of the Assistant Chief Constable's comments, the court records continue to show that one arrest warrant for murder and five for attempted murder are currently recorded on court records as outstanding.

My officials have investigated this anomaly with the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and Police Service (PSNI) and it would appear that the charges relating to the outstanding warrants were either amended (substituting a lesser charge) or a no prosecution decision was taken by the PPS subsequent to the arrest warrant being issued. However these cases were not referred back to court and it is the case that arrest warrants remain 'active' until such times as an application is made to the court to formally withdraw the warrant or the warrant is executed. In statutory terms, the answers given to the Member's previous questions are therefore correct.

Staff in the Courts and Tribunals Service, PPS and PSNI are currently working together on a reconciliation exercise to ensure that any outstanding warrants which require to be withdrawn or amended, are formally referred back to the issuing court.

### **Supporting Prisoners at Risk: Review**

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Justice how many random reviews of Supporting Prisoners At Risk documentation have been carried out as a result of recommendation No. 9 of the Review of the N.I. Prison Service in October 2011.

**(AQW 9550/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Recommendation nine of the Review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service stated that the Prisoner Ombudsman should be invited to carry out random reviews of Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) documentation. Following consultation with the Prisoner Ombudsman and the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland (CJINI), it was agreed that CJINI should carry out an independent audit of SPAR documentation in liaison with the Prisoner Ombudsman. Criminal Justice Inspection completed an inspection of SPAR documentation in Autumn 2011. It is envisaged that CJINI will do two or three random reviews of SPAR documentation per year at each prison establishment.

### **Prisoners: Forensic Psychologist Assessments**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7954/11-15, to outline the reasons for the delay in the assessment of these prisoners.

**(AQW 9570/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Northern Ireland Prison Service has an increasing and dynamic population and consequently waiting lists pending assessment are not unusual. Assessments are prioritised according to risk, need and length of sentence (time available) to ensure that interventions are sequenced according to the needs of the individual.

Assessments and interventions inform the level of risk and the specific areas of offending that have to be addressed to assist the offender in reducing his/her level of risk to the public. There would never be a time when there would be no individual waiting for assessment and interventions.

### **Ronnie Graham: Release from Custody**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether Ronald Terence Graham has been released from custody; and if so, what monitoring measures have been put in place.

**(AQW 9572/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The information requested constitutes sensitive personal data as defined at section 2 of the Data Protection Act 1998. The disclosure of such information is likely to breach the data subject's rights under the Act and would be incompatible with the Data Protection Principles. The information cannot therefore be provided as requested.

### **Marian McGlinchey: Move to Hydebank Wood**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether the adjustments made to accommodate Marion McGlinchey in Hydebank Women's Prison were made to maintain her separated status.

**(AQW 9576/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** As set out in my answer to AQW 9458/11-15 the adjustments made to accommodate Marion McGlinchey were made after a regime and security review during which her separated status was a consideration.

### **Prisoners: Categories**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to list the different categories of prisoner and to provide the definition of each category.

**(AQW 9577/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** All prisoner categories and their definition are listed below:

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| Category A: | Prisoners whose escape would be highly dangerous to the public or the police or the security of the state, no matter how unlikely that escape might be, and for whom the aim of the Prison Service must be to make escape impossible.  |
| Category B: | Prisoners for whom the very highest conditions of security are not necessary, but for whom escape must be made very difficult.   |
| Category C: | Prisoners who cannot be trusted in open conditions, but who do not have the resources or the will to make a determined escape attempt.   |
| Category D: | Prisoners who can be reasonably trusted in open conditions.  |
| Category U: | All remand, awaiting trial or awaiting sentence prisoners/inmates will be placed in Category U (Unclassified). The only exception is those remand prisoners/inmates identified as Category A. All remand prisoners will be reviewed if and when sentenced and allocated to the appropriate Category. |

### Hydebank Wood: Running Costs

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 6579/11-15, for a breakdown of the annual running costs of the courses that are held at the Alderwood Centre, Hydebank Wood, Belfast.

**(AQW 9578/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The annual running cost of the courses held at Alderwood Centre, Hydebank Wood, Belfast is £679,000. The table below provides a breakdown of this cost.

|   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| Salaries & related costs                            | £460,000        |
| Centre running costs & overheads                    | £139,000        |
| Voluntary & Community Sector support for programmes | £ 80,000        |
| <b>Total Annual Cost</b>                            | <b>£679,000</b> |

### Hydebank Wood: Inmate Offences

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last three years, to detail the number of prisoners (i) on remand; and (ii) serving a sentence who have been (a) charged with; and (b) convicted of, committing an offence whilst in prison, broken down by prison facility, including Hydebank Young Offenders Centre and the Juvenile Justice Unit.

**(AQW 9637/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The information requested is not readily available and can only be collated at a disproportionate cost to the public purse.

### Courts: Active Cases

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of cases currently in the (i) Magistrate's; (ii) Crown; and (iii) High Court systems.

**(AQW 9640/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** As of 22 March 2012, the number of active cases recorded on the Integrated Court Operations System ICOS are as follows:

| Court Tier         | Number of Cases |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Magistrates' Court | 34,223          |
| Crown Court        | 1,472           |
| High Court         | 62,673          |

#### Notes:

- (i) Figures include Criminal, Civil and Family Business.
- (ii) As data is drawn from a live operational IT system it will change on a daily basis.



### Sex Offenders: Fit for Release

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice what is the accountability of agencies, in the interests of public protection, when they deem a sex offender to be fit for release and approve residencies if the offender then commits a similar sexual offence; and (ii) whether he will introduce legislation to allow victims who feel they were not protected to challenge those who made the release decision. **(AQW 9695/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Release in respect of sentenced offenders is made in line with statutory requirements. Decisions in relation to release on bail are a matter for the courts.

I have no plans to introduce any changes to legislation at this stage.

### Trafficking Directive

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has to bring Northern Ireland into line with England and Wales in compliance with the EU Trafficking Directive. **(AQW 9696/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Department of Justice officials have been working with colleagues in England and Wales and Scotland to consider the changes that are required to implement the EU Directive on “preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims...” (2011/36/EU). It has been established that changes to primary legislation are required both in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland to create new offences in two areas. I will shortly be launching a consultation exercise on those changes in Northern Ireland. The consultation document has been approved by the Justice Committee and Executive.

### Parades or Processions: Active Cases

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how many cases in relation to taking part in an unlawful parade or procession are currently in the court system, broken down by court division. **(AQW 9697/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** As at 16 March 2012, there were 24 active cases relating to unlawful parades or processions. The table below details the breakdown by County Court Division.

| County Court Division | Number of Active Cases* |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Armagh                | 16                      |
| Belfast               | 2                       |
| Craigavon             | 6                       |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>24</b>               |

\* Data has been extracted from a live operational database and will be subject to change.

### Community Safety Strategy: Antisocial Behaviour

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8897/11-15, how he plans to ensure that improvements are made when indicators, such as police statistics on recorded crime, anti-social behaviour statistics, and findings on experiences and perceptions of crime from the Northern Ireland Crime Survey, fall short of commitments in the Programme for Government, including tackling anti-social behaviour, seeking local agreement to reduce the number of peace-walls and crimes against older and vulnerable people. **(AQW 9739/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Community Safety Strategy will support the delivery of the Programme for Government commitments on tackling anti-social behaviour, seeking local agreement to reduce the number of peace-walls and crimes against older and vulnerable people.

The Programme for Government is supported by a delivery framework within which there are regular monitoring and reporting schedules. As agreed by the Executive, Departments will produce and publish a Delivery Plan for each Programme for Government commitment. The Delivery Plans are living documents and will be regularly reviewed to reflect changing circumstances. Final Delivery Plans will be published at the start of the 2012-13 financial year, when they have been approved by the PfG Programme Board.

### Courthouse Closures: Single Jurisdiction

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9077/11-15, how he plans to address the concerns of consultees that a single territorial jurisdiction could lead to court closures. **(AQW 9764/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The creation of a single jurisdiction would provide additional flexibility for listing Magistrates' Court and County Court business and was widely welcomed by consultees who responded to that consultation.

### Courts: Cases Involving Proscribed Organisations

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how many cases are in the court system for organising or managing a meeting of a proscribed organisation, broken down by court division.

**(AQW 9765/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** There are currently six active cases before the courts relating to organising or managing a meeting of a proscribed organisation. One is before the Court of Appeal in the High Court, one is before Belfast Crown Court and four are before Londonderry Magistrates' Court.

### Parole Applications: Second Attempt

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Justice how many applications for parole were (i) successful; and (ii) unsuccessful at the second attempt in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9767/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Information in the form requested is not available at present. Statistics are currently being gathered as part of a wider exercise and will include information in relation to the number and outcome of reviews. This will be made available when the exercise is completed.

### Court Cases: Human Trafficking

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how many cases involving alleged human trafficking are currently in the (i) Magistrates'; and (ii) Crown court systems, broken down by court division.

**(AQW 9790/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** As of 22 March 2012, there were four active cases involving offences of human trafficking. Two are before Belfast Crown Court, one is before Belfast Magistrates' Court and one is before Antrim Magistrates' Court.

### Court Cases: Prostitution/Brothel-keeping

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how many cases involving alleged prostitution or the running of brothels are currently in the (i) Magistrates'; and (ii) Crown court systems, broken down by court division.

**(AQW 9791/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** As of 25 March 2012, there were twelve active cases involving alleged prostitution and brothel keeping. The table below sets out the breakdown sought.

| Division    | Court Tier         | Number of cases |
|-------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Belfast     | Crown Court        | 2               |
| Belfast     | Magistrates' Court | 6               |
| Antrim      | Magistrates' Court | 1               |
| Londonderry | Magistrates' Court | 3               |

### HMP Maghaberry: Separated Prisoners Protest

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to what level the republican separated prisoners, who are on protest in HMP Maghaberry, have breached the conditions of the required compact for accommodation in separated conditions.

**(AQW 9793/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The terms of the compact for separated prisoners requires them to comply with all lawful instructions given by staff and to conform to the law, the terms of the compact and with Prison Rules. Those prisoners engaged in the current protest are in breach of this requirement.

### Youth Justice Review: Implementation

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the commitment in the Programme for Government to implement 90 percent of the Youth Justice Review recommendations by 2013/14, (i) how the figure of 90 percent was identified and what evidence was used to inform this figure; and (ii) to confirm which recommendations will be implemented which will not.

**(AQW 9795/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Reform of the Youth Justice System in Northern Ireland is one of my key Ministerial priorities. The Youth Justice Review provides a solid basis on which to take this agenda forward. Subject to the outcome of the public consultation, liaison with the Justice Committee and the necessary agreement of Executive colleagues I intend to implement as many of the agreed recommendations as is possible within the Programme for Government timeframe and resources constraints.

The target for implementation of 90% of agreed recommendations was set with the intention of being pragmatic about what could realistically be achieved. Some recommendations may take longer to complete and others may not achieve full agreement. The target was not set with particular recommendations or outcomes in mind, but rather to demonstrate my Department's commitment to making substantial progress whilst being mindful of resource, time, capacity and other constraints. If we can do more we will.

It needs to be re-stated that Executive support and cross-Departmental working is vital if we are to achieve real and lasting success. Without a joined-up collaborative approach we will not be able to deliver all of the outcomes envisaged by the Review Team. Concerted, coherent and timely action will be needed across the board if we are to succeed in addressing the complex social issues that place children at risk of being caught up in crime and creating more victims.

### **Aidan Grew: Legal Aid Costs**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7454/11-15, whether legal aid was applied for in this case and subsequently refused.

**(AQW 9859/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** No legal aid application was made in respect of Mr Grew's trial for taking part in an illegal procession.

### **Juvenile Justice Centre, Bangor: Safety of Site**

**Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department will take responsibility to secure and make safe the site of the former Juvenile Justice Centre at Rathgael Road, Bangor.

**(AQW 9906/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Department of Justice has no responsibility for the site of the former Juvenile Justice Centre at Rathgael Road, Bangor which was sold by the NIO to a private developer in April 2007.

### **Prison Service: Uniform**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice whether the uniform for new staff being recruited to the Northern Ireland Prison Service will have a badge or a motif showing 'HMP' and the Crown.

**(AQW 9915/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** As I have made clear, no decisions have been taken in relation to uniforms for new staff or emblems associated with the Northern Ireland Prison Service. However, as I have also made clear any proposals which are deemed to be controversial will be subject to approval by the Executive.

### **Hospital Staff: Assaults**

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last three years, to detail how many people have been (i) prosecuted and; (ii) convicted for an assault on (a) members of hospital staff; (b) members of Accident and Emergency Department staff; and (c) other patients, in each of the last three years, broken down by each hospital.

**(AQW 9954/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The information requested is not available from the Department of Justice's databases. Court conviction and sentencing datasets do not hold information on the victims of crime.

### **Prison Service: Change Manager**

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Justice what impact the change of person holding the post of Northern Ireland Prison Service Change Manager has had on the reform of the Service.

**(AQO 1656/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Colin Bennett took up the post of Northern Ireland Prison Service Change Manager on 19 December 2011. He subsequently stepped down from that post last month due to personal reasons.

Because of the timing of his arrival, and the interruption of the Christmas holidays, any immediate impact he could bring to the reform programme was limited, but I am grateful for the assistance and support he has been able to give since the start of the year, particularly in the areas of Strategic Business Planning and Corporate Governance.

However, given the brevity of Mr Bennett's time in post and the fact that the development of the SEE Programme was already well advanced before he was appointed, I believe that any negative impact arising from his early departure has been limited.

I am pleased that the speedy appointment of his successor has ensured that there is only a slight delay to the long term benefits that an experienced Programme Manager will bring to both NIPS and the wider Department of Justice as we press forward with fundamental reform of the prison system.

## PSNI: Contracting Out

**Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the arrangements made by his Department to consult on regulations governing the contracting-out of services by the PSNI.

**(AQO 1650/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Department has no general powers to regulate the contracting out of services by the PSNI.

The one exception is a power to make regulations governing the engagement of an agency for the recruitment of police officers and support staff. These regulations were made in 2001 and 2002 respectively, that is, prior to the devolution of justice and would have been subject to consultation with the Board, the Chief Constable, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Police Association.

The Department has no plans to change the current regulations.

## Prison Service: Custody Officers

**Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any discussions he has had to ensure that prison officers receiving an enhanced redundancy package will not be able to apply for the new custody officer positions within the Prison Service.

**(AQO 1652/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Officials in NIPS have taken legal advice regarding the eligibility of those staff leaving under the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme reapplying for the new Custody Officer grade. To exclude those staff from applying for Custody Officer vacancies would have left NIPS vulnerable to claims of indirect discrimination. NIPS are committed to ensuring all appointments are made solely on merit following fair and open competition and in line with NICS recruitment procedures.

Of the 4911 applicants for the Custody Officer competition only one is a serving member of NIPS.

## HMP Magilligan: Literacy

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Justice what action he is taking to address the reported low level of literacy among prisoners in Magilligan Prison.

**(AQO 1658/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The recent Criminal Justice Inspectorate and Education and Training Inspectorate report highlighted education and skills deficits across the prison estate. This is not a new message, nor is it exclusive, to Northern Ireland and I am committed to putting in place measures that will provide quality education, skills training and work experience that are relevant both to prisoners' needs and to the employment market.

In doing so, I plan to build on the pockets of excellent and innovative practice recognised by the report and which have delivered successes within learning and skills provision. Taking Magilligan as an example, over 900 prisoners have gained a literacy-related qualification in the last three years.

As noted earlier though, we need to do more, and work has already begun on identifying and implementing the further measures required to deliver better learning and skills services. There is however both need and opportunity for more progress, particularly in collaboration with other Ministers.

I am pleased that we are already seeing some positive results emerging from this more collaborative approach, with links established between the prisons and DEL's providers of LEMIS – the Local Employment Intermediary Service, which is designed to help unemployed people in the community overcome issues - including low levels of literacy - that may be preventing them from finding and keeping a job.

A number of other measures are also already in train within NIPS and include:

- a review of the range of services available to prisoners and the method of their delivery which is expected to report in the Spring;
- the development of a draft Employability Strategy to ensure that NIPS services provide prisoners with a better opportunity to gain employment post-release;
- revised IT policies to enable greater prisoner access; and
- arrangements to address staff shortages.

## Prison Service: Names and Symbols

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice whether he can confirm that, as part of any reform, the present name, badge, uniform and emblem of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, including the Crown, will be retained and that prisons will continue to be designated as Her Majesty's Prison.

**(AQO 1659/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** There are currently no specific plans to make any such changes.

As I have made clear on a number of occasions, NIPS is undergoing fundamental end to end reform, and these are issues which I would expect to be considered as part of that ongoing review.

However, as I have also made clear, any proposals which are deemed to be controversial would be subject to approval by the Executive.

## Marian McGlinchey

**Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on any discussions he has had with the Secretary of State in relation to the continued imprisonment of Marion McGlinchey.

**(AQO 1660/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The detention of Marian McGlinchey has been discussed as part of the regular Security Interface meeting which I have with the Secretary of State. In the absence of specific medical recommendations justifying compassionate release, I have no role to play in relation to any decision on the continued detention of Mrs McGlinchey, other than to ensure that her needs are being met whilst she is in the custody of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

## Drivers: Alcohol-related Offences

**Miss M McIveen** asked the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to additional measures to ensure that people convicted of alcohol-related driving offences do not reoffend.

**(AQO 1661/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** This is a matter for the DOE Minister, who has policy responsibility for drink driving issues. I share your concern that people who drive after consuming alcohol or drugs put everyone at risk. Therefore it is critical that the appropriate measures are in place both to deal with individuals who are convicted of these driving offences and to deter them from committing further offences in the future.

I sit as part of an Interdepartmental Group with DOE and DRD Ministers that is considering a range of Road Safety Matters. Whilst it falls to me to consider and endorse any proposals for additional offences and penalties, the substantive policy and law around drink driving remains a matter for the DOE Minister. I fully support and endorse the work being undertaken by ministerial colleagues taking the lead in this important area.

## Prisons: Full-body Imaging

**Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on possible alternative methods of searching to replace full body searches in prisons.

**(AQO 1662/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Efforts continue to explore alternative search technologies.

In their final report the Prison Review Team concluded that “fully body searching is intrusive and invades the privacy of all prisoners, but is justified as proportionate and necessary to prevent the smuggling of contraband or weapons”. They go on to say that “if other less intrusive and more effective electronic methods become available, they should be piloted, and their use considered”.

In line with this, NIPS has subsequently conducted a further Review of Full Body Imaging Scanners for potential use in NIPS Prisons.

On the basis of that review, as I have previously said I intend to initiate a pilot of Full Body Imaging Scanners, subject to the necessary authorisation for use of this technology in prisons being obtained. However the use of Transmission X-Ray Equipment has not yet been approved for use in UK Prisons and authorisation must be obtained under the Justification of Practices involving Ionising Radiation Regulations 2004.

## Department for Regional Development

### Car Parks: Publicly Owned

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of publicly-owned car parks that are serviced by (i) huts where tickets are obtained on entrance and payment occurs at departure; (ii) a barrier system; and (iii) a pay and display system manned by traffic wardens.

**(AQW 9411/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):** Details of my Department’s Roads Service charged car-parks are provided in the table below:

| Type of Car Park                | Number |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| Kiosk operated car-parks        | 30     |
| Pay on Foot car-parks (barrier) | 5      |
| Pay and Display car-parks       | 91     |

One Pay on Foot car-park and two kiosk operated car-parks are currently being converted to Pay and Display.

### Gritting Fleet: Upgrade

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department intends to review the age of the gritting fleet; and what plans he has for upgrading the gritting fleet.

**(AQW 9426/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it carries out an annual review of the age profile and condition of its entire fleet of vehicles and plant, including gritters.

Replacement and upgrading of the gritting fleet is subject to the availability of funding and has to compete with other priorities. However, the replacement of winter service vehicles and plant takes priority over the demands of the other vehicles and plant within Roads Service.

In this current financial year, Roads Service is in the process of replacing a total of 13 gritters. This represents an investment of over one million pounds in the continued delivery of this crucial service to the public and the local economy.

### Street Lighting: Running Costs

**Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the total running costs of street lighting in each of the last three years; (ii) the average amount of hours lights are switched on; and (iii) the cost, per kWh, his Department is charged for providing this service.

**(AQW 9434/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** Details of street lighting running costs, which include scouting, routine and planned maintenance, inspection and testing, and energy for the last three years are provided in the table below:

| Year    | Street Lighting Expenditure  |
|---------|------------------------------|
| 2009/10 | £19.02 million               |
| 2010/11 | £20.41 million               |
| 2011/12 | £20.63 million (anticipated) |

My Department's Roads Service has advised that street lights operate on a dusk to dawn profile, which is on average, 10.71 hours per day.

In relation to the cost per kWh that my Department is charged, I should advise that this information is commercially sensitive, and I am therefore unable to provide this level of detail.

### Woodland: UK Forestry Standard

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether all the bodies or organisations within his Department's remit which own woodland are compliant with the UK Forestry Standard, including his Department, any arm's-length body and any organisation to which his Department provides grant aid.

**(AQW 9440/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that a significant proportion of its land is forested and leased to Northern Ireland (NI) Forest Service for the commercial cropping of trees. The NI Forest Service has responsibility for management of land leased from NIW in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS).

The remaining limited areas of forested land owned by NIW which are not leased to NI Forest Service are managed by NIW in accordance with its Environmental Policy and Environmental Management System.

### Walking or Cycling to School

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to help schools encourage pupils to walk or cycle to school in order to meet the target contained in the draft Programme for Government that, by 2015, 36 percent of primary school pupils and 22 percent of secondary school pupils should be walking or cycling to school.

**(AQW 9511/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I fully support the demanding school active travel commitment set out in the Programme for Government. I have tasked my officials with the development of an enhanced programme of engagement with schools so that we will have created the conditions to facilitate meeting the targets for children walking or cycling to school as their main mode of transport by 2015.

My Department through Travelwise NI have invited schools in Northern Ireland to take part in Walk to School Week which runs from Monday 21st to Friday 25th May 2012. In 2011 over 54,000 pupils across Northern Ireland stepped out and walked to school and Travelwise NI is looking forward to increasing the number participating in the 2012 venture.

## Speed Restrictions: 20 Mph Zones

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on the implementation of 20 miles per hour zones. (AQW 9537/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has been installing 20 mph zones for a number of years. These zones contain self enforcing engineering measures, such as road humps, which have played a significant role in greatly reducing serious and fatal collisions in residential areas. Most social housing areas have been treated and Roads Service continues to install further traffic calming measures on routes where vulnerable road users are present.

The Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy to 2020 contains action measures that encourage further roll out of 20 mph zones. There is also a commitment to pilot the implementation of 20 mph limits without additional self enforcing engineering measures. However, delivery has been delayed due to enforcement issues.

I can also advise that Roads Service's speed management strategy gives encouragement to local traffic managers to further extend 20 mph zones, where they are considered necessary.

## Road Safety: Dangerous Junctions

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to improve road safety at dangerous road junctions, particularly for cyclists. (AQW 9539/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has, over many years, been investing significant levels of capital funding in collision remedial and traffic calming schemes. Traffic calming schemes have been particularly effective at reducing the number of casualties amongst vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians and cyclists.

Since 2004, the collision remedial programme has been targeted at specific collision types, such as right turning movements and rear end shunts, with the objective of reducing by 50% the number of target collisions occurring at treated sites over the three years following completion of the works.

My Department encourages increased use of travel by sustainable means, such as walking and cycling, through the establishment of an Active Travel Forum. Already, there has been an encouraging increase in the number of cyclists and the safety of these road users has required extra consideration in the development of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy to 2020. This has resulted in the provision of a number of action measures that will seek to address safety concerns for cyclists. These consist of commitments, subject to the availability of funding, to further develop and maintain the cycling infrastructure with an emphasis on being separate from vehicular traffic, or on roads where a 20 mph speed limit is feasible.

'Green boxes' for cyclists have been provided at signalised junctions to make cycling safer and more convenient. These allow cyclists waiting for a green light to do so at the front of traffic, where they can more readily be seen by motorists and there is less exposure to exhaust fumes. They also help to reduce the conflict between cyclists and motorists when pulling away from the junction and make it easier and safer for cyclists to complete right turn manoeuvres.

I can also advise that research is currently underway in GB, on measures to alert drivers of HGV vehicles to the presence of cyclists when making turning movements and my Department awaits the outcome of this study.

## Cycling: Infrastructure Budget

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development how much of the roads budget is allocated to the cycling infrastructure. (AQW 9540/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service is committed to providing safer roads for vulnerable road users, including cyclists and pedestrians, by utilising a range of measures, such as road safety engineering, traffic calming and enhancement of the pedestrian and cycling network.

Roads Service's objective is to maximise the resources which it has available for cycling provision. In the 10 year period including this financial year, Roads Service will have invested almost £9 million in the provision of 225kms of cycle lanes.

Detailed budgets for subsequent years have not yet been finalised and it is therefore not possible to provide details of future programmes at this time. However, as I am sure you are aware, capital budgets for the period 2011-2015 are under pressure and my Department is faced with the difficult task of maximising outputs from the limited resources available. Therefore in these circumstances, it is not possible to continue to fund all of our functions at the same levels as in previous years.

## Sewer System: Rasharkin

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development what areas of Rasharkin have been added to the public sewer system in the last five years. (AQW 9574/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that during the last five years 56 domestic connections were made to the public sewer system in the Rasharkin area. These were at Churchfields, Valley View and Glebe Road.

### Roads: Cost of Salting the Network

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 7784/11-15, how much the additional 10,000 tonnes of rock salt will cost the Roads Service.

**(AQW 9585/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** The purchase of rock salt by Roads Service is subject to tender and as such, I am not able to disclose the cost of purchase for reasons of commercial sensitivity and in the interests of securing best value for money.

### Gritting Fleet: Trucks

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many gritting trucks have been used by Roads Service in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9604/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the total number of gritting trucks it has used, in each of the last five years, is detailed in the table below:

#### Total number of gritting trucks used by Roads Service in the last five years

| Year    | Number of trucks |
|---------|------------------|
| 2007/08 | 139              |
| 2008/09 | 145              |
| 2009/10 | 145              |
| 2010/11 | 144              |
| 2011/12 | 144              |

### Sewer System: Rasharkin

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many homes on Finvoy Road, Rasharkin have been added to the public sewer system in the last five years.

**(AQW 9605/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that no homes on Finvoy Road, Rasharkin were connected to the public sewer system in the last five years.

### Gritting Fleet: Trucks

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average age of the gritting trucks used by Roads Service in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9642/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the average age of gritting vehicles it has used, in each of the last five years, is detailed in the table below:

#### Average age of gritting trucks used by Roads Service in the last five years

| Year    | Average age of truck |
|---------|----------------------|
| 2007/08 | 5.1 years            |
| 2008/09 | 4.8 years            |
| 2009/10 | 5.5 years            |
| 2010/11 | 6.1 years            |
| 2011/12 | 7.1 years            |

### Media Communications Protocols

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Regional Development what media communications protocols exist between his Department and each of its arm's-length bodies; and to publish these protocols.

**(AQW 9661/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** The Department does not have any media communications protocols with its arms-length bodies.



## Cycling Proficiency Scheme

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans there are to integrate the School Travel Plans targets with the Cycling Proficiency Schemes in schools.

**(AQW 9673/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I continue to be a strong supporter of encouraging children to travel to and from school by sustainable modes and to cycle where this is a realistic option. My support for this is underscored in the Programme for Government commitment to facilitate an increase in the numbers of children walking and cycling to school. Policy responsibility for these things rests with my Department and I am currently considering ways in which we can engage with schools in order to achieve the targets set out in the Programme for Government.

The Department of the Environment (DOE) has no specific remit or statutory authority to promote or encourage the uptake of cycling. DOE does have a statutory duty to promote road safety and one of the ways it does this is through the provision of the Cycling Proficiency Scheme (CPS) which is active in approximately 580 primary schools with an average of 8,800 children trained each year at a cost of £84,000. DOE is concerned with the CPS as a road safety measure and the scheme is aimed mostly at children in Primary 7.

DOE recently commissioned an independent review of CPS to examine the content of the course and methods of delivery to ensure that these are up to date and are fit for purpose. The review will also evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme in terms of reducing child road safety casualties and to determine if the scheme appropriately addresses today's road safety issues. It is anticipated that the review team will report before the end of this calendar year.

## Roadworks: Grass Areas

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what procedures are in place for the reinstatement of grass areas which have been damaged during work carried out by Roads Service; (ii) how the need for reinstatement is assessed; (iii) to detail the tender process for this work; and (iv) what the set cost is per square metre for the reinstatement of these areas.

**(AQW 9674/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that Article 8 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, places a duty on Roads Service to maintain all public roads in reasonable condition giving due consideration to the finite level of available funding.

As a general rule of thumb, it is normally understood that the public road extends between, but does not include the boundaries. I should also explain that, under the 1993 Order, the term "road" includes all public adopted footways, islands, verges, etc.

Roads Service carries out verge maintenance / reinstatement operations for road safety reasons and not for cosmetic or amenity purposes, ensuring that visibility is not restricted and verges are free from obstructions and without defects that would be detrimental to the user. This is particularly important at road junctions and on the inside of bends where clear visibility for motorists is important.

Although road verges generally do not carry vehicular traffic, they may occasionally be used by pedestrians. Therefore, following adjacent road works, Roads Service usually restores verges to their original profile, which includes topsoiling, if necessary, reasonably levelling and seeding. Such works are regularly carried out by either Roads Service's in house contractor, Roads Service Direct, or an external contractor. An external contract can either be as part of a three to five year term contract or as part of a one off tender, depending on the nature of any associated works.

With regard to the set cost per square metre for reinstatements, Roads Service has advised that there is no composite item or square metre rate for verge reinstatement. Verge reinstatement works are measured and valued using a number of items as appropriate, such as importing topsoil, levelling and seeding.

All road maintenance activities are measured and valued upon completion, taking account of the volumes and types of work undertaken. Payment is based on the tendered rates for each work activity and rates usually vary from contract to contract. As I am sure you will appreciate, the rates in a particular contract at any given time are regarded as commercially sensitive and therefore cannot be made public.

## Penalty Charge Notices: Revenue

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the revenue raised by the NSL Services Group in each of the last six years through the payment of (i) penalty charge notices; and (ii) parking charges; and (ii) any other sources of revenue the NSL Services Group receives under the parking enforcement and car park management contract.

**(AQW 9691/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service, not NSL Services Group (NSL), receives all revenue generated from parking charges and Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs). It also makes payments to NSL in accordance with its contract for the provision of parking enforcement and car-park management services.

I would refer the Member to my answer to his previous question (AQW 6669/11-15) which provided details of payments to NSL since the introduction of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement in Northern Ireland in October 2006.

## Car Parking: Pavements

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has any plans to address the problem of cars parked on pavements which can cause inconvenience to pedestrians, particularly people with children and wheelchair users. (AQW 9722/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that there is currently no general prohibition on parking on footways, except for the parking of heavy commercial vehicles which is prohibited and is a matter for the PSNI to enforce.

However, where there are parking restrictions on the adjacent carriageway, indicated by road markings and/or traffic signs, the restrictions also generally apply to the footway and are enforceable by Roads Service traffic attendants. Where there are no marked or signed parking restrictions on the carriageway, and parking on footways is creating an obstruction, the matter should be referred to the PSNI.

Beyond this, it is feasible that a general prohibition or individual prohibitions on footway parking could be introduced. However, the main difficulty that would arise from implementing such bans on footway parking is that many of our streets can only function when footway parking is tolerated. In these streets, the widths are such that cars need to be parked on the footway so that sufficient road space is available for other vehicles using the street. A general ban on footway parking would require a complementary waiting restriction on one side of the street which would severely reduce the availability of parking spaces. The displacement of parked vehicles presents other difficulties as in many areas there is no nearby alternative parking.

In these circumstances, and particularly since the PSNI already has the power to deal with obstruction of the pavement, I can advise that I currently have no plans to change the law on cars parking on footways.

## Landslide: Marlborough Terrace, Londonderry

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Regional Development why there has been disparity in terms of a co-ordinated response to the landslide incident in the Marlborough Terrace area of Londonderry in December 2011, and the response to a similar landslide in the Linen Fields development, Banbridge in January 2010. . (AQW 9782/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** I can advise the Member that my Department's Roads Service was not involved in the response to the wall collapse that occurred in Marlborough Terrace area of Londonderry in December 2011. I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that its involvement in the response, which was led by Derry City Council, was purely advisory to ensure that the infrastructure affected was restored as part of the programme of remedial work initiated by the Council.

The incident at Linen Fields, Huntly Road, Banbridge relates to a wall collapse on private ground, which due to its proximity to a road in a new housing development that may ultimately be adopted, is of interest to Roads Service. Roads Service officials have been seeking to facilitate agreement between the relevant parties in respect of the replacement of the wall. This would allow completion of the outstanding road works and adoption of the roads and footways within the development to proceed. NIW is not involved in the response to the incident at the Linen Fields.

## Penalty Charge Notices: NSL Payments

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Regional Development for a breakdown of the money paid to NSL in each of the last five years.

(AQW 9787/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** Details of the amounts paid to NSL, the service provider for enforcing parking restrictions, in each of the last five financial years is provided in the table below:-

|                 | 2006/07<br>(£M) | 2007/08<br>(£M) | 2008/09<br>(£M) | 2009/10<br>(£M) | 2010/11<br>(£M) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Payments to NSL | 2.4             | 7.0             | 8.5             | 8.9             | 9.3             |

I can also advise that as the main elements of my Department's Roads Service contract with NSL, which include on-street enforcement, off-street enforcement, car-park management, equipment maintenance and cash collection, are all inter-related, payments are not broken down by function. These payments relate to the provision of contracted services across Northern Ireland and are not broken down by town, county, or region.

## Quangos

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the quangos to which his Department makes appointments; (ii) how many members are appointed; and (iii) the remuneration paid to (a) the Chair; and (b) other members. (AQW 9864/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** Full information about public appointments made by the Department for Regional Development is set out in the Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report, published by OFMDFM. The most recent report covers the period 2010/11 and is available from the OFMDFM website or from the Assembly Library's reference collection (Reference number R351.41609 NOR).

### Roadworks: Communication with Businesses

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department will commit to direct communication with businesses regarding upcoming road works in their area which may cause disruption to their business.

**(AQW 9865/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service's arrangements for notifying commercial premises will vary according to the nature of works being completed. Where a roads scheme will cause traffic disruption, or inconvenience is expected to be prolonged, notification is provided by means of:

- a letter drop to all nearby properties and residents with information on the extent and timescale of the disruption and a contact point for further information;
- public notice in the local press; and
- through the Roads Service website.

When completing routine short term maintenance work, such as gully emptying and patching and the disruption to traffic is expected to be minimal, notification is not generally provided or considered necessary.

### University of Ulster: York Street Campus Expansion

**Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions his Department has had with the University of Ulster regarding its expansion at the York Street campus.

**(AQO 1663/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** As a former Minister of the Department for Employment and Learning, I am aware of the significance of this project and would, in principle, be supportive of it. However, the Member will also be aware of the role of my Department's Roads Service as a statutory consultee to the planning process and the importance of each application being assessed objectively based on its relative merits.

Roads Service officials have advised that, together with representatives from the University of Ulster, it has attended Pre-Application Discussions (PADs) with the Department of the Environment's Planning Division over the past year. The PADs dealt with the principle of the development proposal.

Roads Service officials report that they are currently assessing the transport and parking issues relevant to the development proposal and that meetings with the University's Transport Consultants were held on 1 June 2011 and 4 January 2012.

Comments relating to Roads Service's consideration of the Transportation Assessment were uploaded to the Planning Service public webpage on 19 January 2012.

More recently, on the 2 February 2012, I met with Professor Alastair Adair, the University's Pro-Vice-Chancellor, when he outlined the University's proposals to relocate to the York Street area.

### Sewerage: Ballyclare

**Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many homes in Ballyclare have been added to the public sewer system in the last five years.

**(AQO 1670/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that 131 new properties have been connected to the public sewer network in Ballyclare in the last five years.

### Road Noise Action Plan: Update

**Mr Givan** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on identifying clusters as part of the Roads Noise Action Plan.

**(AQO 1671/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** As required by the Environmental Noise Directive, my Department's Roads Service prepared a Road Noise Action Plan that became effective in March 2010. Using the Plan, Roads Service is currently working towards the identification of Noise Management Areas, or to use the Member's term, 'clusters', across Northern Ireland, based on strategic noise mapping. This will highlight locations where mitigation measures could be considered.

It is expected that the Road Noise Action Plan will take another 12 months to complete.

Until the work of the Road Noise Action Plan progresses further, the Department is, at this stage, unable to commit to the provision of mitigation measures. If an area is highlighted within a Noise Management Area, Roads Service will consider action at any site identified, including measures to reduce the effect of noise, in conjunction with a planned scheme in that area.

## Roads: Salt

**Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister for Regional Development how much road salt was used this winter, to date, in comparison to previous winters.

**(AQO 1672/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that as of Friday 16 March 2012, it has used approximately 46,000 tonnes of salt during the current winter season.

In each of the past three years commencing 2008/09, some 82,431, 100,632 and 110,351 tonnes of salt were used respectively.

## Bilingual Traffic Signs: Equality Impact Assessment

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the Equality Impact Assessment on bi-lingual traffic signs has been completed.

**(AQO 1673/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service issued a draft Policy and draft Equality Impact Assessment for Bilingual Traffic Signs for consultation between January and March 2011.

Officials have submitted a first draft of the policy consultation report to me and I plan to make an announcement on the way forward in due course.

## Public Transport: Accessibility

**Mr McCartney** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on research into the accessibility of the transport network for older people and people with a disability.

**(AQO 1674/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department sponsors the Inclusive Mobility Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) to provide advice and information on transport issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people. This includes undertaking research into their transport needs.

IMTAC has recently undertaken research which has focused on the specific barriers that make travel difficult for these groups including; the transport needs of people with learning disabilities, improving web based travel information for disabled people and researching blue badge use in Belfast City centre.

Research is currently being undertaken on a range of topics including; flexible transport, encouraging the development of travel training and barriers to the pedestrian environment.

## Cyclists: Road Safety

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister for Regional Development what work his Department will undertake in conjunction with the Department of the Environment to improve road safety for cyclists.

**(AQO 1675/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I meet regularly with Assembly Colleagues, including Minister Attwood in the Ministerial Road Safety Group, to discuss all aspects of road safety including road safety for cyclists. Specifically, my Department's Travelwise team is working with the Department of the Environment's Road Safety team to produce a joint publication aimed at providing advice for cyclists about safely interacting with other road users.

My Department's Roads Service is committed to providing safer roads for all road users, particularly vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists. This is achieved, by utilising a range of measures, including road safety education and engineering, traffic calming and enhancement of the pedestrian and cycling network.

## A1 Roundabout, Hillsborough

**Mr Craig** asked the Minister for Regional Development what short, medium, and long term plans his Department has to combat peak-time traffic flow issues at the A1 roundabout, Hillsborough.

**(AQO 1676/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has considered a number of options to improve the capacity of the roundabout at the junction of the A1 Hillsborough Bypass with the Lisburn Road, in particular, to cater for traffic during the morning peak.

Detailed assessments have confirmed that a free-flow lane, similar to that provided at the A1/A101 Sprucefield roundabout, is not suitable for this roundabout due to the number of road junctions and private accesses in the vicinity of the roundabout.

Roads Service is currently considering the feasibility of installing part time traffic signals at the roundabout and in this regard, recently attended a meeting with a local representative to discuss the proposal and to consider how best to gauge local support for the scheme. A number of issues were raised and discussions are still on-going.

I have asked Roads Service officials to include you in any future meetings on the issue.

In the longer term, Roads Service plans include the provision of a fly-over type junction as part of the M1/A1 Sprucefield Bypass proposals. However, delivery of such a project will be dependent on funding levels envisaged in the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021, which is currently under consideration, following the recent consultation process.

### Roads: Investment in Rural Areas

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to invest in improvement schemes for small and medium rural roads in Mid Ulster and west of the Bann.

**(AQO 1677/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** The detailed budget for the 2012/13 financial year has not yet been finalised and it is, therefore, not possible to provide details of future works programmes at this time.

However, when works programmes are finalised, information on proposed roads schemes for each financial year can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

[http://www.drni.gov.uk/index/freedom\\_of\\_information/customer\\_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils](http://www.drni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils)

Information on completed and proposed schemes for the current financial year can also be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils at the internet site above.

## Department for Social Development

### Woodland: UK Forestry Standard

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Social Development whether all the bodies or organisations within his Department's remit which own woodland are compliant with the UK Forestry Standard, including his Department, any arm's-length body and any organisation to which his Department provides grant aid.

**(AQW 9495/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):** My Department owns woodland areas in Poleglass and Ligoniel which are managed by Belfast Regeneration Office. These wooded areas are designated as Local Landscape Policy Areas within the Lisburn and Belfast Metropolitan Area Plans and are maintained to an appropriate standard for the benefit of the community. My Department has adopted all legal responsibilities as landowner and the work currently undertaken in these woodlands is consistent with the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard. The lands are included in a programme of regular inspections to address any health and safety issues with any remedial work carried out when required. Some tree, shrub and wildflower planting is also carried out which contributes to the sustainability of the woodland areas.

The Housing Executive, through its support for the 2006 Department of Agriculture and Rural Development forestry strategy, "NI Forestry: A Strategy for Sustainability and Growth" has a programme of new native woodlands creation. This is implemented under the Woodland Grant Scheme which is administered by the Northern Ireland Forest Service and is compliant with the UK Forestry Standard and in accordance with the specifications therein.

The scheme is part financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development under Axis 2 of the NI Rural Development Programme 2007-13. Guidance on site suitability, selection of tree species, local provenance and compliance with the UK Forestry Standard is provided and monitored by the Northern Ireland Forest Service. Additionally this programme contributes to targets set within the NI Biodiversity Strategy.

### Housing: St Patrick's Barracks Site, Ballymena

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister for Social Development when the housing at the St Patrick's Barracks site in Ballymena will be ready for allocation.

**(AQW 9596/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** I understand the Business Case to approve the transfer of these units from Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister for social housing is nearly complete. Once the transfer is complete, Fold Housing Association have already been appointed to take forward the necessary improvement work to the homes and infrastructure, and expect the first handover of units to take place at the end of the contract, which has an indicative time of 10 months to complete.

### Housing Executive Properties: Sold on the Open Market

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Social Development how many ex-Housing Executive properties which transferred to a Housing Association, in each of the last ten years, have been sold on the open market to private purchasers.

**(AQW 9627/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** No ex-Housing Executive properties that were transferred to Housing Associations in each of the last ten years have been sold on the open market to private purchasers.

### Planning Application: Eco-village in Enniskillen

**Mr Lynch** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the development of an eco-village in Enniskillen.  
(AQW 9632/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** An outline planning application for 200 housing units has been submitted for the Grosvenor Barracks site and is currently being assessed by Planning Service.

Clanmil Housing Association has refurbished the 10 existing former MoD houses at Ballaghmore Heights and have all now been allocated to tenants. The Association has also submitted a planning application for a further 16 units on the adjacent undeveloped land.

### Mortgage Relief Scheme: Cost Analysis

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has carried out a cost analysis on the creation of a mortgage relief scheme.  
(AQW 9634/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** My Department has indeed carried out a cost analysis for the creation of a mortgage relief scheme and, as I have previously outlined, it would help only a small number of those facing repossession at a disproportionate cost to the public purse.

I believe our Mortgage Debt Advice Service, operated by Housing Rights Service, provides greater and more practical support to the increasing number of people facing repossession. Since its introduction last year, 992 people have been directly supported through the scheme and I am already looking to see what more we can do to further support this work.

### Mortgage Rescue Scheme

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has considered introducing a scheme, similar to that in Britain, where owner-occupiers are granted assistance to keep their homes rather than being granted temporary accommodation.  
(AQW 9635/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** I have considered the introduction of a full mortgage rescue scheme but, believe it would either help only a small proportion of those owner-occupiers facing repossession or would be extremely expensive to operate. I believe our Mortgage Debt Advice Service, operated by Housing Rights Service, provides greater and more practical support to the increasing number of people facing repossession. Since its introduction last year 992 people have been directly supported and it has increased the level of advice for people experiencing difficulty making mortgage payments.

My Department also funds a range of advice networks not just within the social security agency, but the Law Centre, Advice Northern Ireland and Citizens Advice Bureau helping people with other debt problems, which often have knock-on effects on their ability to pay their mortgage.

### Housing Executive: Temporary Accommodation

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Social Development how many owner-occupiers are currently living in temporary accommodation provided by the Housing Executive as a result of losing their homes, broken down by each district council area.  
(AQW 9636/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** The Housing Executive does not hold the information in the format requested as previous accommodation tenure is not typically a determining factor when assessing homelessness and the Housing Executive does not differentiate between tenures.

### Housing Executive Properties: Cookstown

**Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties are currently vacant in the Cookstown district area, broken down by town/village.  
(AQW 9682/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** The Housing Executive has advised that as at 29 February 2012 they had six vacant properties in the Cookstown area. The table below provides a breakdown: -

| Cookstown Area          | Number | Reason                          |
|-------------------------|--------|---------------------------------|
| Ballyronan              | 1      | Repairs                         |
| Cookstown South         | 3      | Repairs and planned improvement |
| Labourers Cottage Coagh | 1      | Sale pending                    |
| Tully Hogue Tullywiggan | 1      | Repairs                         |

### Housing Executive Properties: Magherafelt

**Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties are currently vacant in the Magherafelt district area, broken down by town/village.

**(AQW 9683/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The Housing Executive has advised that as at 29 February 2012 they had sixteen vacant properties in the Magherafelt area. The table below provides a breakdown: -

| Magherafelt Area | Number | Reason                         |
|------------------|--------|--------------------------------|
| Castledawson     | 3      | Lettable                       |
| Desertmartin     | 1      | Difficult to let               |
| Draperstown      | 1      | Difficult to let               |
| Innistrush       | 1      | Lettable                       |
| Maghera          | 5      | Lettable                       |
| Magherafelt      | 5      | 4 lettable; 1 difficult to let |

### Housing Executive: Waiting List in Cookstown

**Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are on the Housing Executive waiting list in the Cookstown district area.

**(AQW 9684/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** At the 30 June 2011 there were 415 applicants on the waiting list for the Cookstown district area. The Housing Executive has advised that this is the most up to date figure available.

### Housing Executive: Waiting List in Magherafelt

**Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are on the Housing Executive waiting list in the Magherafelt district area.

**(AQW 9685/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** At the 30 June 2011 there were 514 applicants on the waiting list for the Magherafelt district area. The Housing Executive has advised that this is the most up to date figure available.

### Portas Review: Implementation

**Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 6154/11-15, for his assessment of the Portas Review; and whether he has considered any of the recommendations with a view to implementation.

**(AQW 9724/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** I announced on 7 February 2012 that I would be taking the following steps following an initial consideration of the Portas Review:

- 1 Setting up a taskforce of senior officials to respond to the difficult trading challenges facing Northern Ireland's High Streets. The taskforce will review the support which the Department already provides to regenerate town centres to see whether this might be further strengthened in light of the recommended actions identified by Portas, and also reflect Northern Ireland trading circumstances.
- 2 Meeting with representatives of business, local government and my DFP, DRD and DOE Ministerial colleagues to develop a NI Executive action plan to boost the performance of Northern Ireland's high streets.
- 3 Inviting Mary Portas to Northern Ireland to advise on the content of the Northern Ireland action plan.
- 4 Presenting a Report and Action Plan to the NI Executive by April 2012 for endorsement.

Following an initial workshop to consider the issues impacting on the performance of Northern Ireland's high streets, my Department proposes to hold a series of 'high street meetings' around Northern Ireland during April to provide an opportunity for traders to put their views directly to the Department and to test reaction to the issues identified at the workshop.

The time required to complete the above steps means that completion of the report to the NI Executive is now likely to be June 2012.

At that stage I will be in a position to state my Department's assessment of the Portas Review including the 28 recommendations made within the report.

## High Street Landlords: Public Register

**Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will introduce a public register of high street landlords.  
(AQW 9726/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** I have established a taskforce of senior officials to respond to the difficult trading challenges facing Northern Ireland's High Streets. The taskforce will review the support which the Department already provides to regenerate town centres to see whether this might be further strengthened in light of the recommended actions identified by Mary Portas in her recent report to the UK Coalition Government ('The Portas Review: An independent review into the future of our high streets'), and also reflect Northern Ireland trading circumstances. Ms Portas's recommendation to introduce a public register of high street landlords will be considered by the DSD taskforce.

## Boiler Replacement Scheme

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme.  
(AQW 9742/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** The pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme has been hugely successful. £2 million has been invested installing new boilers which will significantly increase the energy efficiency of over 1,330 pensioners' homes. At a time of rising fuel prices I am committed to doing all I can to improve the energy efficiency of vulnerable peoples' homes. As well as improving domestic energy efficiency, the pilot has also provided a much need boost to the local plumbing industry.

The pilot will now be subject to a full evaluation which will be used to inform development of any future schemes.

## Boiler Replacement Scheme

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister for Social Development how many households benefited from the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme (i) in total; and (ii) broken down by council area.  
(AQW 9743/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** At 20 March 2012 there had been 1,265 boiler replacement installations completed. I am confident that the target of 1,330 boiler installations will be met by the end of the financial year.

The table below provides a breakdown by District Council Area.

| District Council Area                    | Installations |
|--|---------------|
| Antrim Borough Council                   | 29            |
| Ards Borough Council                     | 52            |
| Armagh City and District Council         | 60            |
| Ballymena Borough Council                | 94            |
| Ballymoney Borough Council               | 23            |
| Banbridge District Council               | 38            |
| Belfast City Council                     | 81            |
| Carrickfergus Borough Council            | 16            |
| Castlereagh Borough Council              | 62            |
| Coleraine Borough Council                | 75            |
| Cookstown District Council               | 18            |
| Craigavon Borough Council                | 86            |
| Derry City Council                       | 58            |
| Down District Council                    | 45            |
| Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council | 54            |
| Fermanagh District Council               | 54            |
| Larne Borough Council                    | 23            |
| Limavady Borough Council                 | 15            |
| Lisburn City Council                     | 102           |



| District Council Area          | Installations |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| Magherafelt District Council   | 26            |
| Moyle District Council         | 13            |
| Newry& Mourne District Council | 54            |
| Newtownabbey Borough Council   | 80            |
| North Down Borough Council     | 41            |
| Omagh District Council         | 48            |
| Strabane District Council      | 18            |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>1,265</b>  |

The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

### Single Farm Payment: Income-related Benefits

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department assesses Single Farm Payments in relation to income related benefits.

**(AQW 9778/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** A Single Farm Payment is considered for income related benefits as part of the total income from a farming business, less any allowable expenses and deductions for tax and national insurance. If the basic conditions for receipt of an income related benefit are satisfied, a weekly net income figure is calculated. Any amount in excess of the earnings disregard is then deducted from the weekly rate of benefit payable.

### Town Centre Regeneration: Lisburn Road, Belfast

**Mr Spratt** asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will include the Lisburn Road South Belfast, in the action plan to regenerate town centres which will include input by Mary Portas, to tackle challenges faced by traders in the area.

**(AQW 9789/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** I announced on 7 February 2012 that I had established a taskforce of senior officials to respond to the difficult trading challenges facing Northern Ireland's High Streets. The taskforce will review the support which the Department already provides to regenerate town centres to see whether this might be further strengthened in light of the recommended actions identified by Portas, and also reflect Northern Ireland trading circumstances. My Department has received requests for Ms Portas to visit several towns across Northern Ireland. Once we have established a timetable for a visit by Ms Portas my Department will give consideration to which towns it would be possible for her to visit in the limited time available. Full consideration will be given to including the Lisburn Road, South Belfast in any visit programme. I am grateful to you for bringing to my attention the challenges that traders are experiencing in the area. I assure you that my Department will do all that it can to revitalise our high streets across the Province.

### Sunday Trading

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development whether any decisions on Sunday opening hours are the responsibility of the Executive as a whole.

**(AQW 9802/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The Shops (Sunday Trading &c.) (NI) Order 1997 regulates the Sunday opening of large shops. Any proposal to change the law on Sunday opening hours would require primary legislation to be agreed by the Executive and approved by the NI Assembly.

### Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Social Development whether a homeowner, who has a document signed by the Chief Constable stating that their home is unsafe and who would be given full duty applicant status if they applied as homeless, would qualify for an emergency grant under the Scheme for the Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings as detailed on the HousingAdviceNI website.

**(AQW 9815/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The Housing Executive has advised that homeowners do not qualify for an emergency grant under the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme. The Housing Executive has advised the Housing Rights Service, who administers the Housing Advice NI website, to ensure that clear details are provided on this issue.

### Employment and Support Allowance: Reassessments

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people, who were previously in receipt of Incapacity Benefit, and who have been assessed for the Employment and Support Allowance (i) met the criteria; (ii) did not meet the criteria and their cases are currently under review; and (iii) have been refused the Allowance on appeal.

**(AQW 9819/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:**

- (i) The reassessment of an estimated 76,000 existing Incapacity Benefit customers commenced on 28 February 2011. 9,328 customers had completed reassessment by 29 February 2012 with 7,126 customers successfully transferring to Employment and Support Allowance after going through the Work Capability Assessment process.
- (ii) 2,202 customers had their Incapacity Benefit disallowed. A total of 1,368 customers have lodged an appeal.
- (iii) 247 appeals have been heard by an Independent Tribunal. 97 people have been successful in their appeal and 150 have been upheld in the Department's favour.

### Employment and Support Allowance: Reassessments

**Mr McGlone** asked Minister for Social Development how many people, who were previously in receipt of Incapacity Benefit, and who have been assessed for the Employment and Support Allowance (i) did not meet the criteria; (ii) had their payments reduced as an interim measure while their cases are pending review or appeal; and (iii) have had their payments discontinued.

**(AQW 9822/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:**

- (i) The reassessment of an estimated 76,000 existing Incapacity Benefit customers commenced on 28 February 2011. As of 29 February 2012, 9,328 customers had completed reassessment. 2,202 have had their Incapacity Benefit award disallowed following a Work Capability Assessment.
- (ii) The computer systems used to process and maintain Employment and Support Allowance and other benefits cannot identify the number of customers who have not met the criteria for Employment and Support Allowance and have had their benefit payments reduced pending the outcome of an appeal.
- (iii) 2,202 customers had their Incapacity Benefit award disallowed. However 1,368 of these customers subsequently appealed the decision. Pending the outcome of their appeal customers can either continue to submit medical evidence and be paid an assessment rate of Employment and Support Allowance, claim Jobseekers Allowance or not claim any other benefit. On 29 February 2012, our records show that of the 1,368 customers who had appealed, 237 customers were not receiving payment of another benefit.

### Business Improvement Districts: Introduction

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the reasons for the delay in the introduction of Business Improvement Districts; (ii) what actions his Department has taken since the consultation ended on 28 February 2011; and (iii) when he intends to bring forward proposals for the introduction of Business Improvement Districts.

**(AQW 9833/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:**

- (i) There has been no unnecessary delay in the introduction of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). Drawing up proposals for a BID is a decision for local businesses to make, in partnership with their local council. My Department's role is to put in place legislation to provide a statutory framework for BIDs, but businesses could and indeed have already established BIDs on a voluntary basis. Therefore work on developing proposals could start, if businesses so wished, in advance of any legislation being in place and I understand that that has already been the case in some areas.
- (ii) Following the public consultation which ended on 28 February, the Department carried out a detailed analysis of the consultation responses. One of my first actions after taking office in May 2011 was to review the outcome of that public consultation and decide on the way forward. This involved finalising the policy, briefing the Social Development Committee and seeking Executive agreement to draft the necessary legislation. A draft Bill has been received and is currently being considered by my officials.
- (iii) As I have previously indicated in responses to a number of written AOs and indeed during Assembly question time on 12 March 2012, Executive agreement to the BIDs policy proposals was secured in November 2011 and I intend to introduce the draft Bill in the Assembly before the Summer Recess. Subject to its speed of passage through the Assembly, I hope that the Bill will receive Royal assent by the end of the year.

### Warm Homes Scheme

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Social Development to list the contact details of the companies which deliver the Warm Home Schemes.

**(AQW 9875/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The Warm Homes Scheme is delivered on behalf of the Department for Social Development by Bryson Energy and H&A Mechanical Services. The Warm Homes Scheme contact number is 0800 9880559.

### Housing Executive Properties: Rathkeele Way, Derry

**Mr McCartney** asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in Rathkeele Way, Derry, are owned by the Housing Executive. (AQW 9893/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** I can advise that the Housing Executive currently own 26 properties in Rathkeele Way, Londonderry.

### Disability Living Allowance: Chronic Pain

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently in receipt of Disability Living Allowance because they suffer from chronic pain.

(AQW 9898/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** The information requested is not held by my Department. Entitlement to Disability Living Allowance is not based on a medical condition or illness but assessment of how much help someone needs with personal care and/or mobility needs because of their disability.

### Fuel Poverty: Social Tariff System

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Development what representations have been made to energy companies regarding the establishment of a social tariff for (i) older people; (ii) those classed as fuel poor; and (iii) any other group of people.

(AQW 9903/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** Representatives from the energy companies sit on the Fuel Poverty Forum, which I chair, and formerly sat on the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group. Social tariffs were a regular topic of discussion at the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group and the issue remains on the agenda of the Fuel Poverty Forum.

### Quangos

**Mr Weir** asked Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the quangos to which his Department makes appointments; (ii) how many members are appointed; and (iii) the remuneration paid to (a) the Chair; and (b) other members.

(AQW 9991/11-15)

**Mr McCausland:** Full information about public appointments made by the Department for Social Development is set out in the Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report, published by OFMDFM. The most recent report covers the period 2010/11 and is available from the OFMDFM website or from the assembly Library's reference collection (Reference number R351.41609 NOR).

## Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

### Overtime: Security and Usher Services

**Mr Agnew** asked the Assembly Commission for a breakdown of the £160,000 overtime paid to ushers and security staff in the last year; and (ii) why there is insufficient staff to ensure that all working hours are covered on the basis of a regular salary.

(AQW 9521/11-15)

**Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The amount of overtime paid can be broken down as follows:

- (a) ~£60K Arising from a number of vacant posts.
- (b) ~£100K Arising from operational demands which require staff attendance at times outside the current shift pattern including, for example, Member-sponsored events in the evenings or at weekends.

The Security & Usher Services business area has been carrying a number of vacancies throughout 2011/12 which remain unfilled. The Assembly Commission has a reducing budget over the period of the Spending Review which restrains its ability to recruit for vacancies in the Assembly Secretariat. The Commission has instigated a Business Efficiency Programme which has carried out a review of the Security & Usher Services business area. The outcome of the review, may impact upon staffing levels and the need to use overtime.

### Parliament Buildings: Irish Language Community

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Assembly Commission what measures it intends to implement in Parliament Buildings to address the needs of the Irish Language Community.

(AQO 1686/11-15)

**Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** A draft Language Policy has been under consideration by the Assembly Commission and the views of Parties have been sought. Following further discussions at Assembly Commission meetings, it was agreed that Parties would review the draft Language Policy in anticipation of ratifying an agreed Language Policy. The Commission will also consider this issue when it next meets to discuss Good Relations in April 2012.

### **Ormiston House, Belfast**

**Mr McCartney** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on its efforts to dispose of Ormiston House.  
**(AQO 1688/11-15)**

**Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** Ormiston House has been for sale on the open market since January 2011. There has been interest in the site from a number of people for a range of uses but as yet no sale has been concluded. The property remains open to offers.

The Assembly Commission is simultaneously pursuing planning permission for limited development of the site. The Planning Service has forwarded a favourable opinion on this proposal to Belfast City Council for consideration.

### **Parliament Buildings: Irish National Flag**

**Mr A Maskey** asked the Assembly Commission what consideration has been given to the flying of the Irish National Flag in order to better represent Nationalist and Republican communities who use Parliament Buildings.  
**(AQO 1690/11-15)**

**Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The Assembly Commission has not given consideration to the flying of the Irish National Flag.

However, the Assembly Commission is designated as a public authority under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) and under Section 75(2) of the Act, the Commission has a statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

The Commission has agreed to have a future meeting specifically to consider Good Relations issues.

### **Parliament Buildings: Good Relations Strategy**

**Mr McDevitt** asked the Assembly Commission, in light of the Good Relations Strategy, what consideration has been given to ensuring that Parliament Buildings reflects both sections of the community in historical terms.  
**(AQO 1692/11-15)**

**Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** Under section 75 (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission is required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. The Commission is committed to equality of opportunity and good relations. The Commission has recently conducted an internal Good Relations Audit. This audit was completed in late 2011. The Commission has agreed to have a future meeting specifically on Good Relations issues.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 13 April 2012

## Written Answers to Questions

### Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

#### **Northern Ireland Memorial Fund: Underspend**

**Mr Lyttle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any underspend by the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund since 2001.

**(AQW 8348/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister):** The Northern Ireland Memorial Fund has never declared an underspend from 2001 to date. Where projected spend within the NIMF is lower than the amount awarded, we work with them to identify options to ensure the benefit of funding is maximised to victims and survivors. As an independent charity, the NI Memorial Fund has also historically carried forward reserves.

We continue to provide unprecedented levels of funding to both individuals and groups within the sector. In the last two financial years we provided the Memorial Fund with a total £7.3 million in funding. Under the current round of applications the fund has awarded grants up to 31 March 2012.

The new funding scheme will be opening shortly.

#### **Ebrington Parade Ground: Tender Applications**

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 7925/11-15, to detail (i) the names of the 74 successful companies; (ii) the cost of each contract; and (iii) the services each company will provide.

**(AQW 8693/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** An Events Management company was procured by Ilex through an open competition in line with Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) protocol to manage the opening of the Ebrington Parade Ground. This Events Management company appointed the 74 companies that provided services for the opening ceremony. OFMDFM does not therefore hold the information requested.

#### **Child Poverty**

**Mr Weir** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to define (i) child poverty; and (ii) severe child poverty.

**(AQW 8758/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The Child Poverty Act 2010 states that a child is to be taken to be living in poverty if the child experiences socio-economic disadvantage.

A child is to be taken to experience socio-economic disadvantage during any period in which –

- (a) the child lives in a household that falls within the relevant income group for the purposes of section 3 (the relative low income target) or section 5 (the absolute low income target), or
- (b) the child lives in a household that falls within the relevant income group for the purposes of subsection (1)(a) of section 4 (combined low income and material deprivation target) and is regarded for the purposes of subsection (1)(b) of that section as experiencing material deprivation.

#### **Severe Child Poverty**

The Programme for Government 2008-2011 contained a commitment to 'work towards the elimination of severe child poverty by 2012'. In order to meet this commitment, a definition of 'severe' child poverty and a method of targeting vulnerable children for additional help was developed.

Definition as agreed by the Executive on 16 December 2010:

A headline figure based on a 60% median household income (before housing costs) and a material deprivation score of 35 or more is used as the definition of severe child poverty.

### **Fort George: Location**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the regeneration of Fort George is included in the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland - Investing Activity Report for East Londonderry, when the site is located within the Foyle constituency. **(AQW 8882/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** During the public consultation on the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland it was brought to the attention of the Strategic Investment Board that the regeneration of Fort George was included in the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland – Investing Activity Report for East Londonderry instead of the Foyle constituency in error and this has now been corrected.

### **Northern Ireland Memorial Fund: Financial Assistance**

**Mr Nesbitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) for their assessment of the efficacy of the NI Memorial Fund's distribution of financial help; and (ii) whether the proposed Victims and Survivors Service is expected to offer similar financial assistance.

**(AQW 8987/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We continue to provide unprecedented levels of financial help to both individuals and groups. In the last two financial years we provided the NI Memorial Fund with a total £7.3 million in funding for three application processes between April 2010 and October 2011 that gave awards up to 31st March 2012. The new funding application process will commence shortly.

We have also agreed a transitional plan which will see the administration of any schemes pass from the NI Memorial Fund to the new Victims and Survivors Service during the year.

### **Maze/Long Kesh: Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre**

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they can offer an assurance that displays at the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze site will not suggest that people convicted of terrorist offences were political prisoners. **(AQW 9093/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** No detailed content for the exhibition and archive element of the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre has been developed or approved.

### **Programme for Government: Consultation Responses**

**Mr Swann** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many consultation responses were received on the draft Programme for Government.

**(AQW 9180/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We received 432 written responses to the draft Programme for Government. Of this number, 149 were transcripts of a verbatim reply on behalf of the environmental group 'Step Up for Nature'.

### **Ethnic Minority Development Fund 2012-13**

**Ms Lo** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the timescale for funding for the Ethnic Minority Development Fund 2012-2013 to commence; (ii) how panel members and the public will be updated on the Ethnic Minority Development Funding 2012-2013 application process; (iii) whether they would consider hiring temporary staff to minimise the delay in allocating funding, given that the application process has not yet commenced; and (iv) what measures they will put in place to minimise the negative impact the gap in funding may have on groups that are currently in receipt of funding.

**(AQW 9307/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The delivery of the Minority Ethnic Development Fund and ensuring continuity of funding for the sector is a priority for us. In line with the findings of the recent evaluation of the Fund, we intend to establish a longer funding period rather than on a yearly cycle. We believe that this will lead to greater stability and capacity building within the sector.

Work to this end is well advanced and we expect to inform relevant parties about future funding arrangements soon.

We are conscious that any gaps in funding resulting from the introduction of the new fund may have a detrimental impact on services provided to the minority ethnic community and to that end we have extended funding for a further six months for those groups currently in receipt of development funding.

We do not consider that the hiring of temporary staff is necessary at this time.

### **Youth Unemployment**

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what research their Department has carried out on the potential destabilising effect of youth unemployment on the political situation.

**(AQW 9317/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** To date, our Department has not carried out nor commissioned any specific research on the potential destabilising effect of youth unemployment on the political situation.

However, addressing issues that may lead to the disengagement of our young people will be a key component of the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy as it develops. The finalised Strategy will inform any additional actions required in respect of further research.

### **Social Investment Fund: Applications**

**Mr Byrne** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many groups have submitted bids to the Social Investment Fund for the 2012/13 financial year.

**(AQO 1455/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We are currently considering final proposals for the operation of the Fund. Groups will not be applying individually for funds; rather, it is envisaged that each social investment zone comprising of community, political, business and statutory representation will bring forward an area plan setting out their priorities.

### **Victims and Survivors of Historical Institutional Abuse: Forum**

**Mr Moutray** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the establishment of an acknowledgement forum for victims and survivors of institutional abuse.

**(AQW 9348/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Work is ongoing to establish an acknowledgement forum through which victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse will have the opportunity to recount their individual experiences, within a sensitive and confidential environment.

We have secured suitable accommodation in Belfast to house the acknowledgment forum and have recruited an inquiry secretary and office manager to the inquiry team. We will shortly be appointing panel members to the acknowledgment forum.

Work is ongoing to identify suitable offices for the acknowledgement forum in Derry/Londonderry and we hope to identify the most appropriate location shortly.

The launch of the acknowledgment forum and the inquiry will be advertised widely via local and national media and we anticipate that the work of the forum will commence by the beginning of the summer.

### **Legislative Programme: OFMDFM**

**Mr Beggs** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their legislative programme for this Assembly mandate.

**(AQO 1526/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** At this time we have already stated our intention, subject to the agreement of the Executive, to bring forward three Bills during the current Assembly mandate.

On 29 September last year, we announced that we will be introducing legislation in the Assembly to confer statutory powers on the Inquiry and Investigation into Historical Institutional Abuse.

On 18 January this year, we announced that we had asked our officials to prepare the necessary legislation to abolish the Department for Employment and Learning and transfer its functions.

Members will also be aware that the Programme for Government, which the Assembly is considering today, contains our commitment to progress legislation to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services. The Programme also contains our commitment to introduce any legislation necessary to implement any agreed changes to post-2015 structures of Government, and this will be confirmed in due course.

Other requirements for primary legislation relating to OFMDFM responsibilities may arise during this mandate and these will be reviewed on a regular basis.

We have also sought and obtained proposals from other Executive Ministers for Bills which they would wish to introduce during the current mandate, and following agreement to the Programme for Government, we intend to present the overall position to the Executive for its consideration. Subsequently, we will write to the Speaker to advise him of our intentions in relation to an overall Executive legislative programme.

### **Media Communications Protocols**

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what media communications protocols exist between their Department and each of its arm's-length bodies; and to publish these protocols.

**(AQW 9594/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Our Department has no media protocols in place with any of its arms length bodies.

### **Minority Ethnic Communities: Funding**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) what action is being taken to ensure that minority ethnic communities will receive funding after 31 March 2012; and (ii) what interim funding will be available should there be a delay.  
**(AQW 9623/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The delivery of the Minority Ethnic Development Fund and ensuring continuity of funding for the sector is a priority for us. In line with the findings of the recent evaluation of the Fund, we intend to establish a longer funding period rather than on a yearly cycle. We believe that this will lead to greater stability and capacity building within the sector.

Work to this end is well advanced and we expect to inform relevant parties about future funding arrangements soon.

We are conscious that any gaps in funding resulting from the timing of the introduction of the new fund may have a detrimental impact on services provided to minority ethnic communities and to that end we have extended funding for a further six months for those groups currently in receipt of development funding.

### **WAVE Trauma Centres: Victims and Survivors**

**Mr Cree** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the WAVE Trauma Centres are in a position to provide the services necessary for military personnel who have medical problems and mental health issues as a result of active service.  
**(AQW 9649/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** WAVE receives funding via the Community Relations Council to be used for the benefit of Victims and Survivors who have suffered as a result of the conflict here. The definition of those who can be assisted is contained within Article 3 of the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

### **Questions for Written Answer: Failure to Meet Time Limits**

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why they consistently fail to comply with the requirements of Standing Order 20B(4) in relation to the time limits for answering written Assembly Questions.  
**(AQO 1524/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** There are considerable administrative implications of researching, preparing and processing answers to the over 470 questions which have been tabled to us since the beginning of this mandate. It is also a task which must be undertaken by Ministers alongside all the other responsibilities which they carry.

Apart from the sheer volume of questions, delays can arise in particular cases from the nature of the question, including the range and complexity of information provided and the need to give careful consideration to answers on sensitive issues.

### **Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse: Progress**

**Mr P Maskey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse.  
**(AQO 1530/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** As a part of our preparations we reported to the Assembly last month, we have started to prepare the legislation that will give the investigation and inquiry panel the necessary powers to compel people and documents.

Work is underway to establish an acknowledgement forum, through which victims and survivors will have the opportunity to recount their individual experiences to the inquiry, within a sensitive and confidential environment. Consideration is at an advanced stage looking at potential candidates for the inquiry panel and the acknowledgement forum.

The inquiry will have premises in Belfast City Centre and in Derry/Londonderry.

We are also committed to establishing an advocacy service that will provide support to victims and survivors before, during and after the inquiry. We have arranged for interim support to be provided to victims and survivors, whilst this service is established, through Lifeline, which can be contacted on 0808 808 8000. Further information on support available to victims and survivors is detailed on the NI Direct website.

We intend that the inquiry and investigation will conclude within two and a half years of its commencement. The chairperson will then be required to provide a report to the Executive within six months.

### **Police Ombudsman: Appointment Process**

**Mr Copeland** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the individuals involved in overseeing the appointment process for the current Police Ombudsman; and (ii) any remuneration which they received.  
**(AQW 9703/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The appointment of a Police Ombudsman is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, and an independent assessor was assigned by the Commissioner to serve as a full participating member of the appointment panel during the sift of applications and interview of eligible candidates, and to report to the Commissioner at



the end of these stages. The assessor was paid a total of £1,625.00 for this work in accordance with scale rates set by the Commissioner's office.

### **Police Ombudsman: Appointment Process**

**Mr Copeland** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide a breakdown of the cost to date for the appointment process of the future Police Ombudsman.

**(AQW 9704/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The Police Ombudsman position is a key element in the policing architecture. The post was advertised widely in the press in December with the aim of attracting high calibre candidates at local, national and international level. Those travelling to interview were eligible for reimbursement of economy travel, subsistence and, in the case of overseas candidates, overnight accommodation costs incurred, as appropriate, at rates agreed in advance with officials administering the process.

Total identifiable costs for the competition, as at 2 April 2012, amount to £25,944.85 consisting of the following:

- £16,134.45 (advertising)
- £4,900.00 (approximate travel costs, as exchange rate variations may impact on this figure)
- £4,875.00 (appointment panel fees, including for the Independent Assessor)
- £35.40 (ancillary expenses)

### **Landslide: Marlborough Terrace, Londonderry**

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 8201/11-15, whether their Department had any role in initiating a co-ordinated response to the landslide incident in the Marlborough Terrace area of Londonderry in December 2011; and if so, to provide details.

**(AQW 9750/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** In order to advise us of progress, OFMDFM made contact at official level across the range of departments, agencies and other bodies to obtain information on their response to the incident.

### **Programme for Government: Early Intervention**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the Programme for Government does not include a commitment to prioritise funding for early intervention to reduce the potential for young people to engage in offending behaviour.

**(AQW 9779/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We recognise and acknowledge that early interventions are the most effective means of addressing issues that might otherwise affect the ability of young people to fulfil their potential. This includes the discouragement of offending.

The Programme for Government seeks to address the wider issues in a coherent and systemic manner. The Delivery Plans which Departments are producing, in relation to PfG Commitments, will provide further detail including specific reference to a number of proven early interventions.

It is clear from all of this that the Executive has committed and targeted significant levels of funding to support the achievement of positive outcomes for children and young people.

### **One Plan: Ilex Urban Regeneration Company**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on Quarter 1 2011/12 of the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company Limited's One Plan, including the (i) Regeneration Fund Working Group; (ii) Virtual Learning Environment Pilot; (iii) Early Intervention Partnership; (iv) European Youth Capital 2014 application; (v) New City Regeneration Unit; (vi) Ebrington Culture Hub funding application; and (vii) Skills Strategy and Action Plan document.

**(AQW 9831/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Developing the 'One Plan' for the regeneration of Derry/Londonderry, incorporating the key sites at Fort George and Ebrington, is a commitment in the Programme for Government and, since its publication, progress in Quarter 1 has been made on a number of objectives including the following areas.

- i Regeneration Fund Working Group

The Regeneration Fund Working Group has been established and is currently exploring other alternative models for financing and funding regeneration. It is working with the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) to prepare Terms of Reference and commission consultants to assess practical actions around alternative models for financing/funding of the two sites, Ebrington and Fort George, including the consideration of recycling of receipts, with a view to seeking a determination from HM Treasury and Office of National Statistics (ONS) on the appropriateness of the proposed practical actions identified. In addition, the Working Group will work with Derry City Council to prepare Terms of Reference and commission expert financial and legal advice to determine the feasibility, including proof of concept, of the proposed Regeneration Fund for Derry~Londonderry.

## ii Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Pilot

Foyle Cloud (formally VLE) is now entering its 3rd year and is on schedule and delivering outcomes as specified, including:

- Roll out to all 14 schools in 2012/13;
- School Principals wish to expand range of courses on Foyle Cloud in discussions with DE on support.

## iii Early Intervention Partnership

Early Intervention Partnership has been established comprising representation from Derry Healthy Cities, Neighbourhood Renewal, DSD, Public Health Agency, SureStart, Western Education and Library Board (WELB) and Ilex, with Derry City Council taking the lead. At its meeting of 27 March, the Partnership agreed that further work was required to identify quantifiable actions against baseline for objectives within the draft Action Plan. The additional work is to be delivered by mid-May 2012, with a view to finalising the Action Plan in June 2012.

## iv European Youth Capital 2014 Application

This is being taken forward by Derry City Council as the lead partner on this project.

## v New City Regeneration Unit

The Regeneration Programme Unit has been established and is meeting regularly. The Unit is made up of the Chief Executive of Derry City Council, Chief Executive of Ilex, an Officer from North West Development Office and representatives from the Regeneration Forum and the Business Leaders Group.

## vi Ebrington Culture Hub Application

Works on the former Parade Ground have been completed and the new Ebrington Square was opened on 14 February 2012. In addition, funding has been secured for a pilot Animation Programme based on DSD/Custom House Square Model. A business case for the development of a Creative Hub at Buildings 80 & 81 is currently being considered. A Business Case for the Vital Venue at Ebrington for 2013 is awaiting approval.

## vii Skills Strategy and Action Plan

The Skills Directorate was established December 2011 and a draft Skills Escalation and Employment Action Plan for Derry~Londonderry 2011-2015 has been developed. The World Host is progressing well within the City and a working group has been established to maximise uptake in the North West. Derry City Council is the lead partner on this project. Ilex is currently exploring with Chamber of Commerce and North West Regional College (NWRC) the roll-out of tailored leadership and management programme to local SMEs.

### One Plan: Ilex Urban Regeneration Company

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on Quarter 2 2011/12 of the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company Limited's One Plan, including (i) the first meeting of the new City Regeneration Strategy Board; (ii) delivery of the Local Development System; (iii) the launch of integrated place marketing for Derry City; (iv) funding secured for the Quayside development and commenced; (v) establishment of the North West Ireland Working Group to pursue UNESCO World Heritage Status; (vi) the launch of the Diaspora Hall of Fame project at Milwaukee Irish Fest; (vii) the launch of the Creative Classroom project; (viii) the establishment of the Skills Directorate; (ix) the creation of the UNICEF Child Friendly City Framework; and (x) the Tourism and Hospitality Skills Programme underway.

#### (AQW 9868/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Developing the 'One Plan' for the regeneration of Derry/Londonderry, incorporating the key sites at Fort George and Ebrington is a commitment in the Programme for Government and, since its publication, progress in Quarter 2 has been made on a number of objectives including the following areas.

## (i) First Meeting of the new City Regeneration Strategy Board

The first meeting of the new Strategy Board took place in September 2011 and will meet quarterly.

## (ii) Delivery of the Local Development System (LDS)

A number of the constituent groups of the LDS have already met and are currently finalising the structure of the remaining groups.

## (iii) Launch of the Integrated Place Marketing for the City

Marketing proposition is currently being progressed and developed by Derry City Council.

## (iv) Funding Secured for the Quayside development and commenced

Phase I of this development is complete and Phase II went on site February 2012 and is due for completion April 2012. The Department for Social Development is the lead partner on this project.

## (v) Establish North West Ireland Working Group to pursue UNESCO World Heritage Status

Derry City Council is the lead partner on this project and they are currently working to establish the working group to pursue World Heritage Status.

## (vi) Launch Diaspora Hall of Fame project at Milwaukee Fest

Representatives from Ilex, Derry City Council, Failte Ireland, University of Ulster, Letterkenny Institute of Technology and Derry Visitor and Convention Bureau attended this event in August 2011 to promote Derry~Londonderry and Donegal to a global audience.

- (vii) Creative classroom project launched

A keynote event led by Sir Ken Robinson was held in March 2011. This is an ongoing project in association with Culture Company 2013. A follow-up event was held on 26 March 2012 – One Day Learning Conference held in St Mary's College.

- (viii) Skills Directorate established

A Skills Directorate was established December 2011 and a draft Skills Escalation and Employment Action Plan for Derry~Londonderry 2011-2015 has been developed.

World Host Training is progressing well within the City and a working group has been established to maximise uptake in the North West.

Ilex is currently exploring with Chamber of Commerce and North West Regional College roll-out of tailored leadership and management programme to local SMEs.

- (ix) UNICEF Child Friendly framework created

UNICEF has replaced this framework with the "Child Rights Partners Programme" which has the same principles as the Child Friendly Framework. Derry City Council was invited to participate and is the only public authority here to have been invited onto it.

The project is at the initiation stage and the Children's Officer in Derry City Council is leading on this.

- (x) Tourism and Hospitality skills programme underway

Ilex was instrumental through the Skills Directorate in identifying the needs for skills in the tourism and hospitality industry in the lead up to 2013. Working closely in partnership DEL Learning and Skills Sector, Derry City Council, Northern Ireland Tourist Board, and the Department Skills Solutions Services have worked to put in place World Host Customer Services Training across NI.

World Host Training is progressing well within the City and a working group has been established to maximise uptake in the North West.

Derry City Council is the lead partner on this project.

### **One Plan: Ilex Urban Regeneration Company**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on Quarter 3 2011/12 of the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company Limited's One Plan, including (i) the operation of the Local Development Strategy; (ii) the Smart Economy in the North West; (iii) the awarding of the decontamination contract for Fort George; (iv) funding for the North West Regional Science Park; (v) the completion of the business case for Phase 1 of the university expansion; (vi) the establishment of the Literacy and Numeracy pilot scheme; (vii) the establishment of the Family Support pilot scheme; (viii) the completion of the City of Culture programme; (ix) the thermal mapping of Derry City; and (x) the Digital City Action Plan underway.

**(AQW 9869/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Developing the 'One Plan' for the regeneration of Derry/Londonderry, incorporating the key sites at Fort George and Ebrington is a commitment in the Programme for Government and since its publication progress in Quarter 3 has been made on a number of objectives including the following areas.

- (i) Operation of Local Development Strategy

A number of the constituent groups for the Local Development Strategy have already met and are currently finalising the structure of the remaining groups.

- (ii) Smart Economy in the North West

An Economic appraisal has been completed by Derry City Council and will be presented to the Steering Committee following the resolution of a number of queries raised by SEUPB.

- (iii) Awarding of the Decontamination Contract for Fort George

Consultants have been appointed and the draft remedial strategy is to be agreed with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency by June 2012. The tender for the decontamination contract is due to be advertised in September 2012 with tenders to be returned by January 2013.

- (iv) Funding for the North West Regional Science Park

A €14m application has been submitted to SEUPB and a response is expected in May 2012.

- (v) Completion of the Business Case for Phase I of the University Expansion

A Working Group chaired by the Vice Chancellor of the University, Professor Richard Barnett, has been established. The Working Group is currently developing a plan in line with Minister Farry's recent announcement.

- (vi) Establishment of the Literacy and Numeracy pilot scheme

Early Intervention Partnership is developing an Action Plan which will include consideration of a Literacy and Numeracy pilot.

(vii) Establishment of the Family Support Pilot Scheme

This is being progressed as part of the development of the Action Plan for the Early Intervention City Catalyst Programme.

(viii) Completion of the City of Culture Programme

The Culture Company will launch the highlight Programme of Events for 2013 in May 2012 with the full Programme to be released in September 2012.

(ix) Thermal Mapping of the City

Thermal mapping contract was awarded February 2011 but as yet has not been completed as there must be very specific weather conditions for it to be carried out.

(x) Digital City Action Plan underway

An Action Plan is being developed and underway to be delivered by Digital Derry.

### One Plan: Ilex Urban Regeneration Company

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on Quarter 4 2011/12 of the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company Limited's One Plan, including (i) the Fort George and Ebrington Planning Development Frameworks; (ii) the completion of the City Health Plan; (iii) the completion of the Neighbourhood Development Plans; (iv) the completion of the Sustainable City Study; (v) the Charter of Rights for older people; (vi) the Retrofitting Action Plan; and (vii) the Maritime Museum building.

**(AQW 9876/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Developing the 'One Plan' for the regeneration of Derry/Londonderry, incorporating the key sites at Fort George and Ebrington is a commitment in the Programme for Government and, since its publication, progress in Quarter 4 has been made on a number of objectives including the following areas.

(i) Fort George and Ebrington Planning Development Frameworks

The Fort George Framework is due to be completed in April 2012.

The Ebrington Framework proposal is currently being developed by Ilex and is expected to be out to tender by June 2012.

(ii) Completion of the City Health Plan

The Draft City Health Plan is due to be completed by June 2012, subject to resources being made available to Derry Healthy Cities.

(iii) Completion of the Neighbourhood Development Plans

Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans have been realigned by the North West Development Office and the Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships to the objectives and outcomes of the One Plan.

(iv) Completion of the Sustainable City Study

This project is being considered by the North West Development Office.

(v) Charter of Rights for Older People

Derry Healthy Cities is the lead partner on this project and will be taking this forward.

(vi) Retrofitting Action Plan

This will be taken forward subject to the completion of the Sustainable City Study.

(vii) Maritime Museum Building

A Business Case for the Maritime Museum/Archive/Genealogy Centre is currently being developed by Derry City Council.

### Childcare: Average Cost

**Mr Agnew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an estimate of the average cost of childcare per hour.

**(AQW 9966/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** OFMDFM does not currently have access to official statistics on the average cost of childcare per hour. The net cost of childcare to parents will vary according to individual circumstances.

We intend to carry out a consultation later in the year on proposals for a strategy to promote the availability of good quality, accessible, integrated and affordable childcare. This issue will be raised in the consultation and an aim of the strategy will be to provide clearer information on the cost and availability of childcare.

## Papers for Assembly Committees

**Mr McKay** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail all occasions in the last 12 months when their Department has made a presentation to an Assembly committee and provided papers pertaining to that presentation to the committee less than 48 hours beforehand.

**(AQW 9974/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The information requested is detailed in the table below and is provided from the start of the current mandate, May 2011.

| Date of Committee Meeting | OFMDFM Business   | Date Papers sent to Committee |
|---------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| 06 July 2011              | Qualification of the Department's Resource Accounts                                       | 06 July 2011                  |
| 28 Sept 2011              | October Monitoring Round Proposals  | 27 Sept 2011                  |
| 05 Oct 2011               | Review of the European Division   | 04 Oct 2011                   |
| 16 Nov 2011               | Departmental Accounting (including Ministerial Direction in relation to Shackleton Site). | 15 Nov 2011                   |

## Quangos

**Mr Weir** asked First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the quangos to which their Department makes appointments; (ii) how many members are appointed; and (iii) the remuneration paid to (a) the Chair; and (b) other members.

**(AQW 9993/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Information on public bodies, the number of appointees and the remuneration paid to them is set out in the Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report published by our Department.

The most recent Report covers the 2010/11 financial year and is available from the OFMDFM website at [www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/public-appointments-annual-report-2010-2011.pdf](http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/public-appointments-annual-report-2010-2011.pdf) or from the Assembly Library (reference number R351.41609 NOR).

Not included in the OFMDFM section of the Annual Report is the Commissioner for Older People who took up post on 14 November 2011 and receives a salary of £60,000 per annum.

## Questions for Written Answer: Average Time Spent

**Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, for the last year, to detail (i) the average time; and (ii) the longest time it has taken their Department to answer ordinary and priority Assembly Written Questions tabled by MLAs from (a) the DUP; (b) Sinn Féin; (c) the Alliance Party; (d) the TUV; (e) the Green Party; and (f) independent MLAs.

**(AQW 10013/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The information requested is not readily available in the format requested.

## Questions for Written Answer: Average Time Spent

**Mr Swann** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, for the last year, to detail (i) the average time; and (ii) the longest time it has taken their Department to answer ordinary and priority Assembly Written Questions tabled by MLAs from (a) the Ulster Unionist Party; and (b) the Social Democratic and Labour Party.

**(AQW 10107/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The information requested is not readily available in the format requested.

## Minority Ethnic Development Fund

**Mr Eastwood** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether development and project grants will be made available under the Minority Ethnic Development Fund for the 2012/13 financial year.

**(AQW 10207/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** We announced an extension of awards of development funding for a further 6 months on 3 April.

This is gap funding, pending the introduction of a revised Minority Ethnic Development Fund which will take account of the recommendations of a recent evaluation of that Fund.

While the details of the revised fund are yet to be finalised, both development and project funding are likely to be available. The details will be discussed with the minority ethnic sector and other key stakeholders over the coming weeks.

### Capital/Revenue Costs: Departmental Spend

**Mr Copeland** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an estimate of the annual additional cost to their Department of providing its services in our divided society, broken down by (i) capital; and (ii) revenue costs.

**(AQW 10218/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Due to the number of variables involved, it is not possible for our officials to calculate the annual additional cost of service delivery.

### Victims and Survivors Service: Transfer of Skills

**Mr Lyttle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the skills and experience developed by the NI Memorial Fund and the Community Relations Council will be transferred to the new Victims and Survivors Service.

**(AQW 10238/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** It is intended that the staffing structure of the new Victims and Survivors Service will fully address the Service's objectives in the most efficient and effective way possible.

The Service's interim management team have formally initiated the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) process with the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund and the Victims Unit of the Community Relations Council.

### One Plan: Departmental Co-ordination Group

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Inter-departmental Co-ordinating Group in delivering the One Plan for the regeneration of the North West area.

**(AQW 10266/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Developing the 'One Plan' for the regeneration of Derry/Londonderry, incorporating the key sites at Fort George and Ebrington is a commitment within the Programme for Government. A key performance indicator in delivery of the Commitment is to establish a Departmental Co-ordination Group to progress the implementation of Central Government enabled projects under each of the eleven Catalyst Programmes in the 'One Plan'.

Our Department is leading in this exercise. Nominations were sought from other departments for membership of the group and an initial meeting of the group took place in early April.

This group will work closely with other key delivery partners including the Derry-Londonderry Strategy Board, Ilex and Derry City Council in ensuring progress against the 'One Plan' objectives.

### Peace Bridge, Derry: Costs

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the costs of opening the Peace Bridge in Derry, broken down by (a) service provider; and (b) all other associated costs.

**(AQW 10276/11-15)**

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Ilex Urban Regeneration Company has built the Peace Bridge as part of the city's regeneration programme. Funded by the European Union's PEACE III programme (Shared Space initiative), the Peace Bridge is a living landmark and a lasting legacy.

Construction of the bridge commenced in January 2010 and was officially opened on June 25th 2011. The costs of opening the Peace Bridge were as follows:

| Peace Bridge Opening Expenditure |   |           |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------|
| Supplier                         | Activity  | £         |
| Eventor                          | River Activity Manager (paid via Eventor)             | 1,626.00  |
| Eventor                          | Safety Cover Foyle Search & Rescue (paid via Eventor) | 2,855.10  |
| CDS                              | Design Services for the Day                           | 15,944.27 |
| AA                               | Road Signs  | 840.00    |
| Estate Services                  | Stewarding  | 30,000.00 |
| Unit 7                           | Unit 7 PA/AV services                                 | 29,208.00 |
| North Down Marquees              | Marquees  | 24,429.78 |
| Eventor                          | Programme of Events                                   | 43,632.00 |
| Pains Fireworks                  | Fireworks Display                                     | 25,068.00 |

| <b>Peace Bridge Opening Expenditure</b> |                           |                   |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Supplier</b>                         | <b>Activity</b>           | <b>£</b>          |
| PeterD                                  | Catering                  | 23,460.00         |
| D Doherty                               | Civic Choir               | 1,250.00          |
| Codetta                                 | Civic Choir               | 1,000.00          |
| City of Derry Civic Choir               | Civic Choir               | 6,050.00          |
| Artfrique:                              | Opening Ceremony          | 2,350.00          |
| Eventor                                 | Event Management Team     | 5,461.20          |
| Teresa Craig                            | Master of Ceremonies      | 500.00            |
| Corish                                  | Video Production Services | 5,854.80          |
| Big Fish                                | Poster reprint            | 444.00            |
| Yellow Door                             | Catering                  | 13,248.00         |
| Eventor                                 | Event management fees     | 30,188.99         |
|   | <b>Total</b>              | <b>263,410.14</b> |

## Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

### EU Fiscal Treaty: Impact on Northern Ireland

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the potential impact on the farming and agri-food sectors if the electorate in the Republic of Ireland votes against the EU fiscal treaty in the forthcoming referendum. **(AQW 9107/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development):** The Austerity Treaty does not affect the Common Agricultural Policy and, therefore, if the agreement is not ratified in the south of Ireland, then I do not anticipate any direct impact on the farming and agri-food sectors in the north.

### Crossmaglen Republican Monument: Plaques

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 8721/11-15, why it is not appropriate to divulge the content of the plaques, in that there can be no commercial confidentiality; and (ii) whether her Department is aware of the content.

**(AQW 9442/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Whilst my Department are aware of the proposed content of the plaques we do not normally consider it good practice to release information about projects which are still under assessment with no decisions made regarding funding. However with the applicant's permission I attach the proposed wording for each plaque:

#### PLAQUE A

##### Background

The idea to erect a memorial to commemorate all those who had contributed in any way to Ireland's struggle for freedom had long been the aim of Crossmaglen Memorial Committee which first began meeting in 1947.

By 1965, the Committee began in earnest to work towards the realisation of this memorial. In June 1970 the site was generously donated by The Market Committee and is now held in trust by Crossmaglen Memorial Committee.

The cost of the memorial was gathered through fundraising by the local community. Many people contributed their time and expertise to the creation of the monument which was cast by Dublin Art Foundry, granite work to the plinth was done by Mickey Keenan, Newry and engraving was completed by Byrne Monumental Works. All site works were completed by donation by McParland Brothers and the sculptor was Yann Goulet.

The monument, entitled 'Glory', was finally erected during the night in 1979.

**PLAQUE B**

The Sculptor - Yann Goulet

Yann Goulet, sculptor and Breton activist, was born in August 1914 in Brittany and died August 1999 in Bray, Ireland. He was a staunch Breton nationalist who worked tirelessly for the liberation of Brittany.

Throughout his life Goulet spent time in many French and Breton prisons, and at one stage undertook a Hunger Strike which lasted for three weeks. Having eventually fled France for Ireland in the early 40's he was sentenced to death in absentia.

Goulet's artistic career began at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, where he won a scholarship to study art and architecture. In 1952, having been granted Irish citizenship, Goulet became an art professor. He was commissioned to create public works commemorating Irish freedom fighters, including the Custom House Memorial in Dublin, the Ballyseedy Memorial in Kerry and the Glory Memorial in Crossmaglen. He exhibited regularly at the Royal Hibernian Academy, eventually becoming Professor of Sculpture. He was made a member of Aosdána in 1982.

**PLAQUE C**

The Phoenix

The phoenix is a mythical bird demonstrating rebirth, renewal and immortality. It can live for up to 1000 years and at the end of its life legend has it that the Phoenix builds itself a nest which then ignites. The Phoenix burns ferociously until only its ashes remain. From these ashes arises a new, young and vibrant Phoenix.

In Yann Goulet's words,

"The blending of phoenix and freedom fighter is unique in its composition. Surging out of the heritage of Nationalist Ireland, they merge in complete unity, figure and symbol completing each other."

**PLAQUE D**

The Figure

The figure in the sculpture is that of a man striving onwards. There is a sense of movement and energy in the figure, in his striding forward, facing the future.

This sculpture portrays a proud, brave and determined individual embodying the aspirations of the community.

**Rural Tourism**

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her strategy for rural tourism.  
(AQW 9548/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** Tourism has the potential to make a substantial contribution to our economy and can bring immense benefits to rural areas. My Department supports rural tourism in a number of ways, such as promoting local produce and supporting the provision of recreational activities in our Forest Parks. Under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme 2007- 2013 my Department has set a budget of £12m for 'Encouragement of Tourism Activities'. Presently this measure has commitment in the region of £7.7 million for delivery of 138 different projects aimed at enhancing Tourism potential of our rural areas.

The Loughs Agency which is co-sponsored by my Department continues to develop marine tourism and angling in the Foyle and Carlingford areas and is currently progressing a number of important initiatives including the development of a marine event platform and city centre cruise ship quay which will form the centre piece of the 'Clipper 11-12 Round the World Yacht Race' in July of this year, a visitor facility at Benone Beach near Limavady, and canoe trails on the River Foyle and Carlingford Lough.

**Dogs: Microchipping**

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the final provisions of The Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 which come into effect in April 2012, what plans she has to promote the compulsory microchipping of dogs.  
(AQW 9666/11-15)

**Mrs O'Neill:** The control of dogs here is legislated for by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. Local Councils are responsible for enforcing all aspects of the Dogs Order 1983, as amended.

The Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 introduced a number of provisions including making compulsory microchipping of dogs a condition of a dog licence. Microchipping is an essential part of dog control and will assist Council dog wardens to help to reunite stray and stolen dogs with their owners and also to trace the owners of dogs that are dangerous and out of control more quickly.

On 27 June 2011, I attended an event hosted at Parliament buildings by the dog welfare charity, Dogs Trust, to raise awareness of compulsory microchipping. The Dogs Trust provided free microchipping for dog owners at the event and it was attended by a number of MLAs who were encouraged to promote microchipping within their constituency. The event proved to be a great success and in the press release issued by the Dogs Trust, I stated that microchipping was an essential part of dog control here and encouraged dog owners to make use of the free microchipping being provided by the Dogs Trust.



In September 2011, I issued a press release to inform dog owners of the forthcoming provisions of the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 and to advise them of changes to the dog licensing rules coming into effect from 3 October 2011. This was a joint press release with the Councils' Dog Advisory Group. It also advised dog owners of the introduction of compulsory microchipping from April 2012 and encouraged them to take advantage of the free microchipping being provided by the Dogs Trust through local Councils and participating veterinary practices. The press release was extensively covered in local newspapers.

My officials have continued to work closely with Councils and the Dog Advisory Group, who have had a number of ongoing publicity campaigns to advise dog owners of the introduction of compulsory microchipping from 9 April and the free microchipping service being provided by the Dogs Trust, who are working alongside the Councils. The Dogs Trust free microchipping service is also available in 12 pet stores here. For those dog owners unable to get to the pet stores or veterinary practices, the Dogs Trust works in conjunction with local Councils to visit housing areas in their mobile unit.

On 7 March I participated with the Dogs Trust in one of their microchipping campaigns and had my own dog microchipped. At this event, I again took the opportunity to encourage all dog owners to take advantage of the Dogs Trust's generous offer of free microchipping before it becomes a compulsory requirement from 9 April. I conveyed this message in the accompanying press release for the event. I also expressed my gratitude to the Dogs Trust for the invaluable work their organisation carries out in relation to dog welfare and their promotion of microchipping here.

Most recently on 21 March, I issued a press release to announce that the powers for compulsory microchipping of dogs will commence on 9 April. The commencement has also been formally notified to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, Chief Executives of all District Councils, Dogs Trust and the Dog Advisory Group.

I am delighted the Dogs Trust has recently announced that they will be extending their free microchipping campaign for dog owners in the north until the end of 2012.

### **Greyhounds: Welfare**

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to introduce a Bill to enhance animal welfare in relation to the (i) breeding; (ii) working life; and (iii) homing of greyhound dogs at the end of their racing life.  
**(AQW 9769/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Welfare of Animals Act 2011 provides for the welfare of all animals throughout their life, which includes greyhounds and any other vertebrate animal, and protects them from unnecessary suffering. In addition, powers exist within the 2011 Act to regulate any activity involving animals to protect their welfare and this could include the welfare of racing greyhounds should this prove necessary in the future.

My Department issued a 12 week consultation on proposals in the draft Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations 2012 which was carried out between 19 October 2011 and 10 January 2012. The draft Regulations specifically focus on the standards required for any dog breeding establishment, including greyhound breeding establishments here. The draft Regulations include a proposed minimum and maximum age for breeding a bitch and the maximum number of litters.

This consultation was wide ranging and issued to over 2000 consultees. Along with registered breeders, a number of specific greyhound organisations were included, such as Greyhound Welfare NI, Society of Greyhound Veterinarians and the Irish Greyhound Board (Bord na gCon).

Some responses to the consultation proposed exempting greyhounds from these draft Regulations and suggested separate Regulations specifically for greyhound breeding. My officials are currently analysing all the responses received. I will want to consider all stakeholders' views before deciding how to proceed.

I am aware that there are a number of organisations here, in the south of Ireland and in Britain dedicated to rehoming greyhounds when their racing days are over.

### **Pony Trekking**

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 8850/11-15, who provided her Department with the legal advice on the level of public liability insurance for users of Forest Service land.  
**(AQW 9798/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Departmental Solicitors Office provides legal advice relating to land and property matters. The quotation in AQW 8850/11-15 was from a licence prepared by DSO, acting on Forest Service instructions, to prepare the legal documentation underpinning the use of forests by 3rd parties.

The Forest Service Instructions specified the £5 million cover, which is a long standing standard requirement for the use of forestry land by third parties. There was no special consideration given to pony trekking businesses.

As some considerable time has passed since that requirement was set I have asked officials to review the amount to make sure it continues to be appropriate for the activities now taking place in forests within the guidance and general principles provided by the Department of Finance and Personnel on such matters.

## Farm Modernisation Programme: Under-represented Groups

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 8939/11-15, to list the groups that were under-represented in the previous tranches of the Farm Modernisation Programme.

**(AQW 9801/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** In developing the proposed selection criteria for Tranche 3 of the Farm Modernisation Programme my Department has considered the results of the Section 75 monitoring of beneficiaries of the previous two Tranches and population information relating to the equality composition of the farming industry here or society as a whole. A statistical summary of the Section 75 information collated by NISRA for Tranches 1 and 2 is presented in Table 1 below. An assessment of the impacts of these Tranches of the Farm Modernisation Programme on each of the Section 75 groups is summarised at pages 17-20 of the Farm Modernisation Tranche 3 Equality Impact Assessment which closes for consultation on 18 April 2012. A copy of this document can be found on the

Department's website at: [www.dardni.gov.uk/index/consultations/active-consultations/farm-modernisation-tranche-3-equality-impact-assessment.htm](http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/consultations/active-consultations/farm-modernisation-tranche-3-equality-impact-assessment.htm).

The cumulative response rate to the Section 75 monitoring forms, issued to successful applicants in these tranches, is approximately 21%. I would encourage all applicants to return their monitoring forms to help improve the reliability and representativeness of the data used for Section 75 monitoring.

**Table 1: Section 75 results from Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 beneficiaries compared with population information**

| Section 75 Category | FMP Tranche 1 beneficiaries                       | FMP Tranches 1 + 2 cumulative beneficiaries       | Population information                      | Source of Population Information       |
|---------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Gender              | 89% male  | 91% male  | 95% male                                    | EU Farm Structure Survey 2010          |
| Marital Status      | 82% married                                       | 77% married                                       | 68% married                                 | EU Farm Structure Survey 2010          |
| Disability          | 7% with a disability                              | 5.8% with a disability                            | 27% of farmers with a disability            | Farmers & Farm Families Survey 2001/02 |
| Dependants          | 40% no dependants                                 | 42% no dependants                                 | 27% no dependants                           | Farmers & Farm Families Survey 2001/02 |
| Racial Group        | 99% white   | 98% white   | 99% white                                   | 2001 Census                            |
| Country of birth    | 99% north of Ireland                              | 97% north of Ireland                              | 91% north of Ireland                        | 2001 Census                            |
| Sexual Orientation  | 97% heterosexual                                  | 97% heterosexual                                  | 98% heterosexual                            | NI Life and Times Survey 2009          |
| Religion            | 77% Protestant<br>20% Catholic<br>2% Other        | 61% Protestant<br>37% Catholic<br>2% Other        | 54% Protestant:<br>44% Catholic<br>2% Other | Farmers & Farm Families Survey 2001/02 |
| Political Opinion   | 68% Unionist<br>16% Nationalist<br>15% Not stated | 53% Unionist<br>30% Nationalist<br>17% Not stated | 50.5% Unionist, 42% Nationalist             | Westminster Election 2010              |
| Age                 | 4% 25 and under                                   | 5% 25 and under                                   | 1% under 25; 5% under 35; 20% under 45      | EU Farm Structure Survey 2010          |

### ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS

#### Gender

Our Section 75 monitoring shows that 91% of beneficiaries under Tranche 1 and 2 are male. Population information shows that 92% of farmers are male. There is no significant imbalance between FMP beneficiaries and the contextual information. Due to the make up of the farming industry as a whole, it is likely that the majority of applicants will be male. DARD will, however, ensure that women are alerted to the FMP through ways that are easily accessible to women e.g. rural women's organisations.

### Marital Status

Our Section 75 monitoring, shows that 77% of Tranche 1 and 2 beneficiaries are married. Population data show that 71% of farmers are married. This indicates that there is an over-representation of married people amongst beneficiaries to date. We are not aware of any aspects of the delivery or criteria for FMP which may have caused an adverse impact in terms of marital status and would welcome any comments on this point.

### Disability

Our Section 75 monitoring shows that 5.8% of Tranche 1 and 2 beneficiaries have stated that they have a disability, (similar to the proportion in T1) although the population information shows that 27% of farmers have a disability. This may indicate non-declaration on the forms, or a lower response rate from farmers with a disability or an under-representation of farmers with a disability amongst beneficiaries to date.

In Tranche 2, the Department put in place mitigation actions to assist those who may be unable to access a computer or to use one to submit an application electronically. DARD also put in place measures to ensure widespread access to DARD offices or other support, and promoted the scheme in different formats. There was widespread discussion and support for these actions. Over 600 farmers used the mitigation actions to submit FMP applications online. It is our intention to use these methods again for Tranche 3. Our delivery agent, Countryside Agri-Rural Partnership (CARP), will have a helpline in place and farmers who call this number will be directed to a range of local sources of support.

### Dependants

Our Section 75 monitoring shows that 42% of Tranche 1 and 2 beneficiaries have no dependants, similar to T1. Population information shows that 27% of farmers have no dependants. This indicates an over-representation of farmers without dependants amongst beneficiaries. However, as we are not aware of any aspect of the delivery or criteria in Tranche 2 which may have caused an adverse impact in terms of dependants, we would welcome comments on this point. The fact that Tranche 3 will have additional marks to favour young farmers (those under 40), who are more likely to have young dependants, may have a positive influence on this group.

### Racial Groups

Our Section 75 monitoring shows that 98% of Tranche 1 and 2 beneficiaries identify as white. Population information shows that 99% of farmers are white. There is no significant imbalance between beneficiaries and the contextual information and we therefore are not proposing any mitigating actions in respect of racial groups.

### Country of birth

Our Section 75 monitoring shows that 97% of Tranche 1 and 2 beneficiaries were born in the north, and population information (census) shows that 91% of people were born here. We consider that this reflects the realities of farm ownership here, rather than any adverse equality impact created by the Tranche 2 application process or criteria. The vast majority of our farms are family owned, and are traditionally passed down from father to son/daughter, remaining in the family. This may explain the high number of beneficiaries born locally. We do not propose any mitigating action with regard to country of birth.

### Sexual Orientation

Our Section 75 monitoring shows that 97% of Tranche 1 and 2 beneficiaries identify as heterosexual. There is no significant imbalance between FMP beneficiaries and the contextual information, and we do not intend to propose any mitigating actions with regard to sexual orientation.

### Religion

The low response rate of the monitoring forms (21% T1 and T2) and the lack of information on how representative these returns are of all beneficiaries, mean that the data must be interpreted with great care and that it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions.

The Section 75 monitoring suggests that 61% of Tranche 1 and 2 beneficiaries are Protestant. The Farmers and Farm Families Survey 2001/02 indicates that 54% of farms were owned by a member of the Protestant community and 44% by a member of the Catholic community. This suggests an over-representation of Protestants amongst beneficiaries to date, although less than in Tranche 1. One of the objectives of Tranche 2 was to prioritise those areas where incomes are lower and the need for support for modernisation is greater i.e. Less Favoured Areas (LFA). The apparent change in representation may reflect the impact of this land classification criterion in Tranche 2, as farmers in the SDA are predominantly Catholic, those in DA are broadly 50:50 Catholic:Protestant and farmers in lowland areas are predominately Protestant. DARD analysis of Tranche 2 shows that the approach taken has been very successful in targeting those in Less Favoured Areas in most need of assistance to modernise. Given the high proportion of Letters of Offer not taken up by applicants (25%), the data suggest that the targeting through the land classification criterion has met the greater part of the effective demand amongst this group. Moreover, the additional marks for those not successful in previous tranches should act to mitigate any remaining imbalance by increasing success among groups under-represented in the programme to date.

### Political Opinion

Our Section 75 monitoring suggests that 53% of Tranche 1 and 2 beneficiaries identify as Unionist, 30% as Nationalist and 17% did not state a political opinion. The Westminster election has been used by the Department as a guide to political opinion and in 2010 50.5% voted Unionist and 42% Nationalist. Against this, our monitoring data suggests a slight overrepresentation

of Unionists and a substantial under-representation of Nationalists amongst beneficiaries to date. Both figures have changed significantly from Tranche 1. The change in representation may again reflect the impact of the land classification criterion in Tranche 2 as referred to above. However, with such a low response rate and a significant proportion of "not stated" it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about the extent of under-representation of Nationalists over the two tranches. Again, the 20 additional marks for those not successful in previous tranches should act to increase success among groups under-represented in the programme to date.

#### Age

Our Section 75 monitoring shows that 5% of Tranche 1 and 2 beneficiaries are aged 25 and under. Contextual information shows that 1% of farmers are less than 25 years old. DARD analysis of the young farmer criterion shows that 24% of beneficiaries were aged under 40 in Tranche 1 and 54% in Tranche 2 compared to the nearest available comparator of 25% aged under 45 (from the EU Farm Structure Survey). This shows that the priority given to young farmers in the criteria has had a substantial impact. We recognise the importance of supporting young farmers and propose to continue to encourage young farmers by retaining the selection criteria which awards additional marks for young farmers aged 40 years or under. We have also consulted with the Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster (YFCU) and other stakeholders on this criterion and they are supportive of this approach.

### Renewable Energy and Leisure: Business Case

**Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 7100/11-15, (i) when the business case for testing commercial opportunities in renewable energy and leisure, including caravan and camping, was completed; (ii) to detail the timescale for the conclusion of the approvals process; and (iii) to outline the associated budgetary limitations and expenditure to date on this project.

**(AQW 9837/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Consultants presented the Business Case for commercial opportunities in renewable energy and leisure in March 2011. This was reviewed within the Department and was recently sent to the Department of Finance & Personnel for approval. At this stage I am unable to provide a timescale for completion of the necessary approvals. The contractual budgetary provision put in place by my Department and the Strategic Investment Board for preparation of the Business Case was £100k. Approximately 50% of this has been paid.

### Camping: Commercial/Non-commercial

**Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the rationale in classifying over-night camping as commercial as opposed to non-commercial.

**(AQW 9839/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Forest Service is directed by the Department of Finance and Personnel to comply with Managing Public Money NI (MPMNI) which sets out the main principles for dealing with resources used by public sector organisations in NI (NI).

As directed by MPMNI, the standard approach to setting charges for public services is to aim for full cost recovery. Where services are supplied into competitive markets, the charges should be set at a commercial rate, including delivering a proper return on the use of resources acquired with public funds.

MPMNI directs public suppliers of commercial services to respect competition law. Otherwise public services using resources acquired with public funds might disturb or distort the fair operation of the market, especially where the public sector provider might be in a dominant position.

The provision of caravan and camping is a service of this kind therefore classification as commercial recreation is appropriate.

Non-commercial recreation refers to visits to all of our forests with entrance charges only levied for the 9 Forest Parks, therefore full cost recovery cannot realistically be achieved in the foreseeable future and the short term objective is to recover at the maximum level that the market will bear.

### Forest Recreation Provision

**Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether statutory requirements exist for leisure facilities to be categorised within the commercial forest industry.

**(AQW 9840/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Forest Service is directed by the Department of Finance and Personnel to comply with Managing Public Money NI (MPMNI) which sets out the main principles for dealing with resources used by public sector organisations in NI.

This provides the statutory basis for forest recreation provision to be classified as either commercial or non-commercial.

### Netting: Lough Neagh

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what role her Department or its arm's-length bodies have in the (i) regulation of netting in Lough Neagh; and (ii) enforcement of such regulations.

**(AQW 9841/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** DARD or its arm's-length bodies have no role in the regulation of netting in Lough Neagh. It is the responsibility of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) to regulate netting in Lough Neagh and for the enforcement of such regulations. On one occasion on 15 March 2012 DARD contributed a boat and two staff to assist DCAL at their request to look for nets on Lough Neagh.

### Genetically Modified Food

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the impact that the introduction of genetically modified food would have on the agricultural sector.

**(AQW 9845/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The European Union operates a control regime for the evaluation and approval of genetically modified (GM) ingredients for food and feed. Only GM varieties that have been scientifically assessed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as safe can be approved for use in the EU. However, none of the GM crop varieties that are approved for growing in the EU are currently grown in the north of Ireland. Market forces and consumer preferences will also have a part to play in determining demand for food derived from genetically modified material.

The local livestock industry, particularly the pig and poultry sectors, relies heavily on imported feed material such as soya from North and South America where GM varieties are widely used. Only feed material containing GM varieties that have been approved through the EU control regime can be imported into the north of Ireland.

In the north of Ireland roles and responsibilities for the full range of issues raised by the genetic modification of food and animal feed are distributed across several local Departments and agencies, including the Department of the Environment (DOE) and the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

The safety of GM material for human consumption is a matter for the FSA, so the FSA is in the lead on GM authorisations. The DOE is responsible for policy and legislation on the environmental safety of GM material and therefore would be the lead on any request to grow GM crops in the north.

DARD's role is strictly limited to the enforcement of European law governing the importing of animal feeding stuffs and seed certification. DARD implements EU regulations which require labelling of all feed products derived from genetically modified material. Approval of GM seed is at European Union level and decisions are not made locally.

I am both personally and politically opposed to the growing of GM crops on the island of Ireland.

### Eggs: Imported into Northern Ireland

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any evidence of eggs being imported into Northern Ireland which have been produced by hens kept in battery cages.

**(AQW 9873/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department has no evidence of eggs being imported into the north, which have been produced by hens kept in battery cages since the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive came into force on 1 January 2012.

From 1 January 2012 my Department's inspectors have not identified any batches of non-compliant Class A eggs, either of domestic origin or from other EU Member States. To date, only a small number of consignments of eggs from other Member States have been encountered. Origin details of these consignments were checked against Member States' lists of compliant premises and inspectors examined the eggs under ultra-violet light. The eggs were found to be compliant with Egg Marketing Regulations, including production method criteria.

EU Egg Marketing Regulations require all Class A eggs to be labelled with their method of production and this must be in conformity with production criteria specified in the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive.

Any eggs produced in systems which do not meet these production criteria are prohibited from being placed on the Class A (shell egg) market but may be used for processing or disposed of as an Animal By-product.

### Field Boundary Restoration

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the make, manufacture and specification of measuring wheels used by her Department in the verification of measurements for Field Boundary Restoration work under the Countryside Management Scheme.

**(AQW 9907/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The details of measuring wheels that are used to measure Field Boundary Restoration work for the Countryside Management Scheme (CMS) are provided in Table 1. In 2011 my Department also used mobile mapping and Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to accurately measure Field Boundary Restoration work during inspections for the 2010 claims to the new Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS).

**Table 1**

| <b>Make</b>                      | <b>Manufacture</b>         | <b>Specification</b>  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Trumeter 5000 - 611              | Trumeter Technologies Ltd  | Accuracy $\pm$ 1%     |
| Trumeter Measurimeter            | Trumeter Technologies Ltd  | Accuracy $\pm$ 1%     |
| NEDO Lightweight Measuring Wheel | NEDO Nestle & Fischer GMBH | Accuracy $\pm$ 0.05 % |

### Field Boundary Restoration

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) which certified body is responsible for the calibration of the measuring wheels used by her Department in the verification of measurements for Field Boundary Restoration work under the Countryside Management Scheme; (ii) how often each wheel is calibrated; and the permissible tolerance.

**(AQW 9908/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department uses measuring wheels to measure Field Boundary Restoration work for the Countryside Management Scheme (CMS). My Department also uses mobile mapping and Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to measure Field Boundary Restoration work during inspections for the new Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS).

- (i) My Department does not use a certified body to calibrate measuring wheels.
- (ii) Measuring wheels are examined before every inspection for signs of damage which may cause reduced accuracy. This year DARD intends to commence an in-house calibration exercise for measuring wheels. Measuring wheels are purchased with a tolerance of  $\pm$  0.05% or  $\pm$  1% depending on the manufacturer.

### Field Boundary Restoration

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development which certified body completed the training for of departmental staff in the use of measuring wheels used by her Department in the verification of measurements for Field Boundary Restoration work under the Countryside Management Scheme.

**(AQW 9909/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department does not use a certified body for the training of Departmental staff in the use of measuring wheels, but rather training is completed in-house. Measuring wheels are bought with a tolerance of  $\pm$  0.05% or  $\pm$  1% depending on the manufacturer.

### Field Boundary Restoration

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many measuring wheels are used by her Department in the verification of measurements for Field Boundary Restoration work under the Countryside Management Scheme; and (ii) whether her Department holds calibration and maintenance records for each wheel to allow full traceability and audit.

**(AQW 9910/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:**

- i) My Department uses 27 measuring wheels to measure Field Boundary Restoration work for the Countryside Management Scheme (CMS). These wheels were also used for rapid field visits for the new Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS). However in 2011, my Department also used mobile mapping and Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to measure Field Boundary Restoration work during inspections for the 2010 claims for the new Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS).
- ii) My Department does not hold calibration and maintenance records for these wheels, however this year DARD intends to commence an in-house calibration exercise for measuring wheels.

### Animals: Disposal

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers have been prosecuted for failing to properly dispose of dead animals in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9923/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:**

| <b>Dates of Conviction</b> | <b>Number of persons convicted</b> | <b>Number of offences</b> |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 23/03/2007-22/03/2008      | 8                                  | 18                        |
| 23/03/2008 – 22/03/2009    | 3                                  | 9                         |
| 23/03/2009 – 22/03/2010    | 3                                  | 3                         |

| Dates of Conviction     | Number of persons convicted | Number of offences |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 23/03/2010 – 22/03/2011 | 4                           | 5                  |
| 23/03/2010 – 22/03/2012 | 6                           | 8                  |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>24</b>                   | <b>43</b>          |

31 offences of failure to dispose of carcasses – 19 persons convicted

7 offences of allowing animals access to carcasses – 5 persons convicted

5 offences of failure to comply with a notice to dispose of carcasses - 3 persons convicted

### Bovine Tuberculosis: Cattle Slaughter

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many (i) beef; and (ii) dairy cattle have been slaughtered as a result of Bovine Tuberculosis in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 9925/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The Department does not routinely record the detailed information sought. However, for the purpose of this question, dairy cattle reactors have been defined as female animals of a recognised dairy production breed and beef cattle reactors taken as all other TB reactors.

| Year | All Reactors | Beef Cattle Reactors | Dairy Cattle Reactors |
|------|--------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 2011 | 8136         | 4328                 | 3808                  |
| 2010 | 6404         | 3912                 | 2492                  |
| 2009 | 8198         | 4239                 | 3959                  |

### Beef and Dairy Industries: Departmental Advisers

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Departmental advisers are currently servicing the (i) beef; and (ii) dairy industry.

**(AQW 9926/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department currently has (i) 12 advisory posts to assist beef farmers and (ii) 16 advisory posts to assist dairy farmers.

### EU Welfare of Laying Hens Directive

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the meetings she has had in relation to member states' compliance with the EU Welfare of Laying Hens Directive.

**(AQW 9950/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** I have had discussions with Minister Simon Coveney and Minister Jim Paice on several occasions about compliance with and enforcement of the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive. I have also had meetings with the Ulster Farmers' Union and the British Egg Industry Council to discuss my enforcement strategy in relation to the Directive.

The Welfare of Laying Hens Directive was also raised by the Defra Minister of State, Jim Paice, when he met EU Commissioner John Dalli in London on 6 February 2012.

All Member States' Action Plans have been discussed at the monthly EU Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH) meetings, which took place in January, February and March 2012. At the SCoFCAH meeting in Brussels on 8-9 March, it was reported that 13 Member States remain non-compliant with the Laying Hens Directive.

The Commission has undertaken the actions that we were pressing for; formal infraction letters have been sent to all 13 non-compliant Member States; these Member States have been required to submit action plans for achieving compliance and they have agreed not to export any conventional caged eggs (just the food or industrial product made with those eggs). The Commission is targeting its EU Food and Veterinary Office Audit Missions in the non-compliant Member States.

### Papers for Assembly Committees

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail all occasions in the last 12 months when her Department has made a presentation to an Assembly committee and provided papers pertaining to that presentation to the committee less than 48 hours beforehand.

**(AQW 9975/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Since May 2011, the Department has provided papers relating to a Committee presentation in less than 48 hours as outlined below:-

| <b>Description/Topic</b>                                     | <b>Date paper issued to Committee</b> | <b>Date of presentation to Committee</b> |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| Budget Settlement (including Savings Plan)                   | 31 May 2011                           | 31 May 2011                              |
| DARD Business Plan 2011/12                                   | 27 June 2011                          | 28 June 2011                             |
| Non-Commercial Movement of Pet Animals Regulations (NI) 2011 | 28 November 2011                      | 29 November 2011                         |
| DARD Business Plan 2011/12                                   | 9 January 2012                        | 10 January 2012                          |
| Schmallenberg Virus update                                   | 28 February 2012                      | 28 February 2012                         |

The Department aims to provide information to Assembly Committees in accordance with existing guidelines and subject to any specific timescales which may have been agreed with the Committee Clerk.

### **Badger Diggers: Threat**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken to counter the threat posed by badger diggers; and what effect the movement of badger diggers has had on the spread of disease in farm animals and wildlife.

**(AQW 10005/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** While the badger is a protected species under the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985, the statutory and enforcement responsibility does not rest with my Department. I am aware of the recent allegations made about interference with badger setts and badger baiting and I deplore any such illegal activity.

Movement of personnel between farms will represent a risk if biosecurity advice is not followed. There is no scientific evidence that would enable my Department to measure the effect of the movement of badger diggers on the spread of disease in farm animals or wildlife. However, I am not aware of any TB breakdown in any cattle herd that can be attributed to such alleged activity.

### **CPR: Staff Training**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what strategy is in place to train departmental staff in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

**(AQW 10006/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** To comply with the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1982, an assessment of the requirement for fully trained and certified First Aiders is conducted at each departmental location and the relevant number of staff appointed. All departmental First Aiders are fully trained in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation as part of their certification course.

In addition, due to the large number of students and customers who use the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise Campuses, defibrillators are available at each site. A number of staff have been trained to operate the defibrillators to ensure that there is coverage at all times.

### **Hydroelectric Scheme: River Camowen**

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any concerns about the recently installed hydroelectric scheme on the River Camowen in Omagh. [R]

**(AQW 10007/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Rivers Agency are satisfied that all necessary precautions in respect of drainage and flood risk were met to allow the scheme to progress. Any issues raised have been addressed during the planning and consent process, to comply with schedule 6 of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973.

### **Hydroelectric Scheme: River Camowen**

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department was fully involved in the consultations on the installation of the hydroelectric scheme on the River Camowen by Omagh District Council. [R]

**(AQW 10008/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Rivers Agency were fully consulted by Planning Service as a consultee in respect of the drainage and flood risks associated with this development. My Rivers Agency also worked with the developer on this project who provided a flood risk assessment to my Rivers Agency.



## Dogs: Licensing and Microchipping

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to increase the compliance rates for dog licensing and microchipping.

**(AQW 10045/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The control of dogs here is legislated for by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. Local Councils are responsible for enforcing all aspects of the legislation. The Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 introduced a number of provisions including making the microchipping of dogs a condition of the licence.

Local Councils provide my Department with statistics relating to enforcement of the Order on a quarterly basis. These statistics have shown a steady rise in the number of dog licences issued each year. In 2005 over 95,000 licences were issued. This has increased every year with almost 135,000 licences issued in 2011.

During the past year I have taken part in a number of initiatives aimed at increasing public awareness and encouraging voluntary uptake before microchipping became compulsory on 9 April 2012.

For example, on 27 June 2011 and 7 March 2012, I attended events hosted by Dogs Trust as part of their campaign to provide free microchipping. At both of these events I took the opportunity to encourage dog owners to take advantage of Dogs Trust's generous offer of free microchipping.

In September 2011, I issued a joint press release with the Councils' Dog Advisory Group advising dog owners of the forthcoming provisions of the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 and to advise them of changes to the dog licensing rules which came into effect on 3 October 2011. The press release was extensively covered in local newspapers and the media.

Most recently, on 21 March 2012, I issued a press release to announce that the powers for compulsory microchipping of dogs commenced on 9 April. The commencement has also been formally notified to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, Chief Executives of all District Councils, Dogs Trust and the Dog Advisory Group.

My officials have continued to work closely with Councils and the Dog Advisory Group, who have had a number of ongoing publicity campaigns advising dog owners of the introduction of compulsory microchipping and the free microchipping service being provided by Dogs Trust.

I am delighted Dogs Trust has recently announced that they will be extending their free microchipping campaign for dog owners in the north until the end of 2012.

My Department will continue to monitor the statistics provided by Councils relating to the enforcement of the Order, which will include the new requirement for microchipping since 9 April 2012.

## Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, how her Department will address the consequences of breed specific provisions including (i) the breeding of 'status' dogs; (ii) the number of stray dogs; (iii) a false sense of security for owners of other types of dogs; and (iv) the unnecessary public expenditure on the seizure of dogs because they are of a certain breed, rather than having displayed aggression; and whether she will make a statement on this issue.

**(AQW 10049/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:**

- (i) The control of dangerous dogs, is regulated under the Dogs Order 1983 ("the Order"), as amended. The Order designates certain dog types which it is an offence to own. These are dogs that are of a type bred for fighting, including Pit Bulls, Japanese Tosas, Dogo Argentinos and Fila Brasilieros. Councils are responsible for enforcing this legislation and may seize any dog that appears to be of a prohibited type. The Dangerous Dogs Order 1991, which banned ownership of Pit Bulls and Japanese Tosas, and the Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order 1991, which banned Dogo Argentinos and Fila Brazilieros, were both introduced in October 1991.

The issue of the ban on certain dangerous dogs was considered during the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development's scrutiny of the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 ("the 2011 Act"), and was raised in debates during the Act's passage through the Assembly, but ultimately no change to the ban was proposed. The 2011 Act made no changes to the existing prohibition, but it provided some clarification to the circumstances in which an exemption from the prohibition could be made available through the courts.

The 2011 Act has strengthened the provisions to deal with the issue of uncontrolled dogs and dog attacks regardless of the breed of dog involved. It has introduced a new system of control conditions that Council dog wardens may impose where there has been a breach of dog control law. These controls include keeping the dog securely fitted with a muzzle when in a public place; keeping it under control (leashed) when in a public place; keeping the dog securely confined in a building, yard or other enclosure when not under control; keeping it away from any place; and/or having the dog neutered (if male).

- (ii) Under the Order it is an offence to allow a dog to stray, regardless of its type. The 2011 Act introduced compulsory microchipping from 9 April 2012. This, along with robust control conditions, the new offence of a dog attack on another pet, more substantial penalties and stiffer fixed penalties, will help dog wardens enforce the law. It will also hold careless

or irresponsible owners and keepers to account where they have failed to exercise adequate control of their dogs. The new provisions will help protect the public, promote responsible ownership and penalise irresponsible owners.

- (iii) During consultation on the 2011 Act, some stakeholders raised concerns about the prohibition on certain dog types only. While certain types of dogs are prohibited because of the specific risk they pose, this does not imply that other dogs are not dangerous. The legislation provides protection to the public from dangerous dogs regardless of their breed.
- (iv) In my view it is not a waste of public money to remove dangerous dogs from harming the public whether they are of a prohibited type or not. Public safety is my key priority. It was for this reason that the 2011 Act increased the resources available for enforcement by Councils through an increase in the level of the dog licence fee. In addition, the Act provided for an increase in the levels of fixed penalties, the receipts from which are, for the first time, kept by Councils.

### **Loughs Agency: Prosecutions**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the 161 illegal nets seized by the Loughs Agency, how many prosecutions have been brought and how many are ongoing.

**(AQW 10063/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** 10 cases relating to 18 individuals have been presented to the Loughs Agency's solicitors for ongoing processing through the courts.

### **Loughs Agency: Prosecutions**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the 12 boats seized by the Loughs Agency, how many prosecutions have been brought and how many are ongoing.

**(AQW 10064/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** 11 boats were persons unknown or abandoned by persons fleeing the scene of an incident. 1 boat is the subject of an ongoing case.

### **Loughs Agency: Prosecutions**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the 36 bags of Oysters seized by the Loughs Agency, how many prosecutions have been brought and how many are ongoing.

**(AQW 10065/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** 12 bags of oysters seized resulted in persons being formally cautioned, 2 bags were seized owner unknown, and 22 bags of oysters are the subject of ongoing court proceedings against 2 persons.

### **Loughs Agency: Prosecutions**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the two cars seized by the Loughs Agency, how many prosecutions have been brought and how many are ongoing.

**(AQW 10066/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** In relation to the two cars seized by the Loughs Agency, there are 2 ongoing prosecutions involving three individuals.

### **Countryside Management Scheme: Payments**

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department is on target to make the 2011 Countryside Management Scheme payments.

**(AQW 10071/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department makes Countryside Management Scheme (CMS) payments on an on-going basis. CMS is claimed throughout the year around the anniversary date of the agreement. The new Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) is claimed annually on the Single Application Form. DARD aims to begin making payments for 2011 claims for NICMS by September 2012. DARD is currently on target to meet this date.

### **Countryside Management Scheme: Payments**

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Countryside Management Scheme payments have been issued for 2011; and what is the timescale for release of all payments.

**(AQW 10072/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Department makes Countryside Management Scheme (CMS) payments on an on-going basis. CMS is claimed throughout the year around the anniversary date of the agreement. The new Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) is claimed annually on the Single Application Form. My Department has not yet issued payments for 2011 claims for the NICMS. In line with EU requirements, all inspections must be completed before any claims can be paid. I expect that inspections will be completed by August 2012 after which payment processing will begin. The timescale for all payments will be determined by the findings of the inspections.

### **Capital/Revenue Costs: Departmental Spend**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an estimate of the annual additional cost to her Department of providing its services in our divided society, broken down by (i) capital; and (ii) revenue costs.

**(AQW 10090/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Due to the number of variables involved, it is not possible for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) to calculate the annual additional cost of service delivery.

### **Crossmaglen Republican Monument: Plaques**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 9489/11-15, whether the representations from the Joint Council Committee had the support of both its unionist and nationalist membership; and what is the wording planned for the plaques.

**(AQW 10101/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The SOAR Joint Council Committee is an incorporated body empowered by my Department to deliver funding under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme. Its internal decision making process is governed by its Standing Orders i.e. each decision must have a proposer, seconder and have the support of the majority present to vote. The request to the Department to review its decision on the eligibility of the proposed Crossmaglen Monument project was conveyed on behalf of the JCC by its Chairman.

The proposed wording for the plaques has been provided in response to your AQW 9442-11-15.

### **Fishing Gear: Seizures**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, further to her statement on 26 March 2012 on the North-South Ministerial Council meeting, over what period the (i) 161 illegal nets; (ii) 12 boats; and (iii) 2 cars were seized.

**(AQW 10102/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The seizures were made between the 1st January 2011 and the 13th November 2011.

### **Fishing Gear: Seizures**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, further to her statement on 26 March 2012 on the North-South Ministerial Council meeting, how many people have been (i) arrested or questioned; (ii) charged; and (iii) processed through the courts and with what result, in relation to the (a) 161 nets; (b) 12 boats; and (c) 2 cars that were seized; and what happened to the seized items.

**(AQW 10103/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** No one was arrested as the Loughs Agency does not have the power of arrest.

18 people have been charged with all cases remaining pending.

In relation to the seized items, 80 nets and 5 boats have been the subject of destruction orders by the courts and 81 nets, 7 boats and 2 cars are in the process of being presented to the courts for orders for their forfeiture and destruction.

### **DARD Headquarters: Suitable Locations**

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has established a shortlist of suitable locations for her new departmental headquarters.

**(AQW 10182/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** As you will be aware the advancement of the relocation of the Headquarters of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is one of the commitments set out in the Executive's Programme for Government 2011-2015. Work on delivering this important commitment is progressing. The Programme Board for DARD HQ Relocation recently submitted a paper to me with views on possible shortlisting criteria to ensure alignment with the key Executive Strategies and policies. I am currently considering this with a view to establishing a shortlist of suitable locations. This will help to inform the way ahead including the options to be considered in the outline business case.

### **Administration Costs**

**Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much of her Department's total allocation from the European Commission is directed to administration.

**(AQW 10196/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** Of the income received from the European Commission, there is only one area where my Department directs income to administration, i.e. NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) Axis 1 and Axis 3.

The amounts DARD has directed to administration from the European Commission from the start of the NIRDP i.e. 2007, to the end of January 2012 are as follows:

| Axis 1  | Axis 3  |
|---------|---------|
| £2.082m | £3.725m |

### Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the impact of the Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, specifically the provision to allow dog wardens to attach conditions to dog licences where a dog's behaviour has led to a breach of the legislation; and whether there are any plans for an extension of dog control legislation to include private land.

**(AQW 10210/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** The control of dogs here is legislated for by the Dogs Order 1983 ("the Order"), as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 ("the Act"). The new provisions, which give powers to council dog wardens to attach control conditions to dog licences where an offence under the Order has been committed, came into operation on 3 October 2011.

The purpose of these provisions is to give council dog wardens greater powers to enforce changes to the management of a dog and so help to protect the public from dangerous or problem dogs. These provisions received widespread support during consultation.

My Department will monitor the enforcement of the new provisions through the quarterly statistical information that Councils are required to provide regarding the enforcement of the dog control legislation generally. Councils will be required to provide information regarding the new provisions of the Act starting from June 2012. At present, it is too early to make an objective assessment of the impact the new provisions are having.

Many of the provisions within the Dogs Order 1983, as amended, apply to private land. For example, under Article 25C, a magistrate may issue a warrant authorising a dog warden to enter and search premises in order to seize a dog of a banned type. Under Article 28, a person is guilty of an offence if they set a dog on another person, livestock or any animal owned by another person; this applies no matter where the attack takes place unless the person attacked is trespassing. Article 42 gives dog wardens the power to enter any land, other than a dwelling house, in order to prevent a dog attacking a person, livestock or another dog.

We now have the most robust dog control legislation in these islands and I have no plans to extend the legislation any further at this time.

### Flooding: South Antrim

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what work has been (i) proposed; (ii) commenced; and (iii) completed following the flooding in the South Antrim constituency in 2008.

**(AQW 10324/11-15)**

**Mrs O'Neill:** My Rivers Agency has commenced and completed various schemes to improve flood protection to urban areas within the Sixmilewater catchment since August 2008. Works completed at Antrim and Muckamore include raising of the floodwall and flood bank at Meadowside, culvert replacement at Abbeyview and the removal of a bridge across the river at Grangers Mill. Culvert works have also been completed at Edenduff and Ballynure. Work to improve the flood alleviation at Fourmile Burn is in progress. In October 2010, my Rivers Agency also completed a major Feasibility Study, with an Economic Appraisal which has been approved by DFPNI. Any further schemes identified, will be prioritised alongside other such schemes and taken forward as financial resources permit. My Rivers Agency has no further works planned for this area at this time.

## Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

### Media Communications Protocols

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what media communications protocols exist between her Department and each of its arm's-length bodies; and to publish these protocols.

**(AQW 9567/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure):** The Department is presently seeking agreement with its ALBs on a Communications Protocol. The Department will publish the document once finalised.

SportNI has drafted and asked for the Department's agreement on two communications protocols.

### Communications Protocol

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will publish the memo on press guidelines which she sent to her Department's arm's-length bodies.

**(AQW 9655/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Department is presently seeking agreement with its ALBs on a Communications Protocol. The Department will publish the document once finalised.

### Communications Protocol

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why she issued the memo on press guidelines to her Department's arm's-length bodies.

**(AQW 9658/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Department has issued a letter to ALBs on a communications protocol in order to promote best practice in communication to ensure that the media and the general public are fully informed about DCAL and the work of the ALBs.

### IFA/GAA: Ministerial Meetings

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what meetings she has had with (i) the Irish Football Association and (ii) the GAA in 2012 to date.

**(AQW 9730/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** During 2012 I have met with the Gaelic Athletic Association to discuss the Líofoa 2015 initiative. I met with Patrick Nelson from the Irish Football Association on 23 August 2011 and I plan to meet with the IFA in the near future to discuss the Líofoa initiative.

I have also had a meeting on cultural awareness at which GAA officials were present.

### Special Advisers: Selection Process

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the selection process that will be followed for the appointment of her new special adviser.

**(AQW 9731/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The DCAL Special Adviser will be appointed in accordance with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as amended.

### Cultural Events: Ministerial Attendance

**Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what cultural events she plans to attend during 2012.

**(AQW 9734/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** To date in 2012 I have attended the following open air cultural events:

| Event  | Date          |
|--|---------------|
| Opening of Ebrington Square, Derry               | February 2012 |
| GAA Participation in Derry City of Culture event | March 2012    |
| Switch on of the Global Rainbow                  | March 2012    |

At this time it is my intention to attend the following events later this year:

| Event  | Date        |
|--|-------------|
| School Games at Olympic Park                 | May 2012    |
| Unveiling of the Olympic Rings               | May 2012    |
| "La Boheme" at Belfast and Derry sites       | May 2012    |
| Newry Olympic Torch Relay Celebration        | June 2012   |
| London 2012 Festival – Peace One Day Concert | June 2012   |
| Land of Giants Main Event                    | June 2012   |
| Paralympic Flame Festival                    | August 2012 |

These intentions may be subject to change, and further events will be added to my diary as the year progresses.

## Sports Clubs: Grant Funding

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much grant funding has been awarded by her Department or its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years, to sports clubs that are named after people who took part in the Maze Prison hunger strikes.

**(AQW 9797/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The name of a sporting organisation is not part of any assessment criteria for funding and Sport NI, which is responsible for the distribution of funding to sport, does not monitor awards that it provides to sporting clubs on the basis of whether or not they are named after people who took part in any Long Kesh/Maze hunger strike. I am, however, aware that in 2009/10 an award of £245,000 was made to one club, Kevin Lynch's Hurling Club, towards the construction of changing rooms and toilet facilities.

## Decade of Centenaries: Ulster-Scots Academy

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has received or sought any advice from the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Ulster Scots Academy in relation to how the decade of centenaries should be commemorated or celebrated.

**(AQW 9961/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** On 15 March 2012, Ministers agreed that it was appropriate and necessary for the Executive to set the tone and provide leadership in putting an official acknowledgement process in place to mark the forthcoming Decade of Commemorations. It was unanimously agreed that I and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment will jointly bring forward a programme based on the principles of; educational focus, reflection, inclusivity, tolerance, respect, responsibility and interdependence.

Our arts and cultural base can play a key role in telling the stories behind these centenaries and other significant anniversaries. The knowledge and skills within the arts, museums, libraries, public records, the creative industries and, indeed, the MAGUS, can help us to explore historical facts, review different interpretations, and gain a better understanding of who we are and how our past shapes our relationships today.

MAGUS is considering commissioning research studies into various aspects of those centenaries of relevance to Ulster-Scots history, heritage and culture. Should these studies go ahead, then they will provide further insight into our connected past and help inform the broader official acknowledgement process being put into place by the Executive. There is a diverse range of significant events from the distant and more recent past that are important to many people. The key issue is not whether these events are remembered but how they are remembered in the context of a shared and accepting society.

## Theatres: Lottery Funding

**Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many of the Local Authority controlled regional theatre venues were built with Arts Council lottery funding.

**(AQW 9962/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Thirteen Local Authority controlled regional theatre venues (including multi-purpose arts centres containing performance spaces) received lottery funding from the Arts Council towards the cost of building or refurbishment.

See attached table:

| Local Authority                          | Project  | Grant      |
|--|--|------------|
| Antrim Borough Council                   | Antrim Castle Gardens -Clotworthy House Arts Centre                  | £241,862   |
| Antrim Borough Council                   | Refurbishment/Conversion - Old Antrim Courthouse                     | £500,407   |
| Armagh City & District Council           | Marketplace Theatre  | £3,672,452 |
| Ballymena Borough Council                | The Braid Arts Centre  | £2,000,000 |
| Coleraine Borough Council                | Extension to Flowerfield Arts Centre                                 | £1,387,875 |
| Cookstown District Council               | Burnavon Arts Centre   | £1,125,585 |
| Down District Council Arts Service       | Extension to Down Arts Centre  | £620,510   |
| Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council | Castle Hill Development; Refurbishment & Extension of Ranfurly House | £500,000   |
| Larne Borough Council                    | Refurbishment of Carnegie Library for arts provision                 | £269,976   |
| Lisburn City Council                     | Island Arts Centre   | £1,301,571 |
| Newtownabbey Borough Council             | Theatre at the Mill  | £371,309   |
| Omagh District Council                   | Strule Arts Centre   | £4,000,000 |

| Local Authority           | Project           | Grant    |
|---------------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Strabane District Council | Alley Arts Centre | £763,250 |

### Theatres: Arts Council Funding

**Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many of the Local Authority controlled regional theatre venues currently receive arts funding from the Arts Council to assist in the programming of the venues.

**(AQW 9963/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** No Local Authority controlled regional theatre venues currently receive arts funding from the Arts Council.

In March 2009, due to budgetary pressures, the Arts Council ceased providing annual funding to local authority owned theatre venues in order to concentrate its funding on the independent arts sector.

Local authority owned theatres can apply to other programmes but are a low priority.

### Theatres: Capital Funding

**Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans there are to enable regional theatre venues outside Belfast to access capital funding to develop their arts facilities.

**(AQW 9964/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** My Department has no plans to fund capital arts projects over the next three years. There has been a significant investment in capital arts projects in recent years as a result of which there are a number of high quality arts venues across the north of Ireland including the Crescent Arts Centre, Lyric Theatre, Playhouse Theatre and Waterside Theatre.

There is however, capital funding of £200k available per year over the next three years which will enable regional venues and other arts organisations to apply for minor refurbishment and equipment.

This funding will be administered by the Arts Council.

### Papers for Assembly Committees

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail all occasions in the last 12 months when her Department has made a presentation to an Assembly committee and provided papers pertaining to that presentation to the committee less than 48 hours beforehand.

**(AQW 9976/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** From the start of the current mandate, on one occasion my Department provided papers pertaining to a presentation to an Assembly Committee less than 48 hours beforehand. The Departmental briefing was on the Review of Core Funding by Foras na Gaeilge.

Arrangements for the provision of papers are discussed and agreed in line with the guidelines for the provision of information between Departments and Assembly Committees.

### European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities: Advisory Committee

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department communicates or interacts with the Advisory Committee for the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

**(AQW 9978/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** A DCAL official met Members of the Advisory Committee for the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities during its visit to Belfast on 7 March 2011.

Interaction between DCAL and the Advisory Committee in written form is through OFMDFM.

### European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities: Irish Language

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, over the last 5 years, what advice on the Irish language her Department has provided to the Advisory Committee for the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

**(AQW 9979/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** DCAL provided input to the second report submitted by the British Government pursuant to Article 25, paragraph 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities which was received by the Council of Europe 22 February 2007.

The full report can be viewed on their website at the link below.

[http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3\\_FCNMdocs/PDF\\_2nd\\_SR\\_UK\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3_FCNMdocs/PDF_2nd_SR_UK_en.pdf)

The third report was received on 23 March 2010 without Northern Ireland input. The Northern Ireland input was not agreed.

A DCAL official met Members of the Advisory Committee for the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities during its visit to Belfast on 7 March 2011.

The Committee was advised of the commitment in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 Section 28D which states:

*“(1) The Executive Committee shall adopt a Strategy setting out how it proposes to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language.”*

### **European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities: Ulster Scots**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, over the last 5 years, what advice on Ulster-Scots her Department has provided to the Advisory Committee for the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.  
**(AQW 9980/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** DCAL provided input to the second report submitted by the British Government pursuant to Article 25, paragraph 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities which was received by the Council of Europe 22 February 2007.

The full report can be viewed on their website at the link below.

[http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3\\_FCNMdocs/PDF\\_2nd\\_SR\\_UK\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3_FCNMdocs/PDF_2nd_SR_UK_en.pdf)

The third report was received on 23 March 2010 without Northern Ireland input. The Northern Ireland input was not agreed.

A DCAL official met Members of the Advisory Committee for the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities during its visit to Belfast on 7 March 2011.

The Committee was advised of the commitment in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 Section 28D which states:

*“(2) The Executive Committee shall adopt a Strategy setting out how it proposes to enhance and develop the Ulster Scots language, heritage and culture.”*

### **Creative Industries: Duplication of Activities**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the duplication of activities across her Department, its arm's-length bodies and other agencies and initiatives in relation to the Creative Industry sector.  
**(AQW 9981/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The challenges facing the creative industries in the north of Ireland include a fragmented sector with insufficient scale and engagement in international markets, and diverse government interventions which at times lack effective coordination.

The diversity within the creative industries means that no one department, agency or representative body can fully realise the sector's potential in isolation.

My Department, in partnership with DETI and Invest NI, is developing a collaborative framework to define the structures, roles and principles guiding strategic collaborations and investment across the creative industries. This aims to harness the region's creative skills and knowledge and support businesses in developing innovative content, products, services and experiences capable of competing in global markets.

The framework will constitute a strategic partnership between industry, government and academia to realise the potential of the creative industries and their contribution to rebuilding and rebalancing the economy.

### **Big Screen, Derry**

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure who is responsible for the programming shown on the Big Screen in Derry.  
**(AQW 10004/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Derry Live Sites Programme is managed by the BBC, the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games & Paralympic Games (LOCOG) and Derry City Council.

The Live Site programme brings the public the latest news in the lead-up to the 2012 Games and is at the centre of action during the Games this summer.

Sporting fixtures and music performances will also be part of the programme.

### **Toome Eel Fishery: Hook Sizes**

**Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to the recent incident in which hooks were measured and removed from the Toome eel fishery, (i) whether the hooks were an unacceptable size; (ii) whether the fishery concerned asked for an amnesty for the remainder of the year; and (iii) whether any amnesty was granted.  
**(AQW 10014/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:**

- (i) The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) has carried out sampling of hook sizes currently being used by long-line eel fishermen on Lough Neagh and has found that some hooks did not meet the regulatory specifications as prescribed in the Eel Fishing Regulations (NI) 2010.



- (ii) On being informed of the outcome of the sampling above, the Lough Neagh Fishermens Co-operative Society (LNFCS) asked that DCAL consider permitting the continued use of irregular hooks until such supplies become exhausted.
- (iii) The Department could not sanction the use of hooks which were not compliant with the regulatory specifications.

I would also advise that the LNFCS provided samples of stocks of hooks it held for measurement and no hooks were removed from LNFCS premises.

### **Salmon Fishery Conservation Measures: Consultation**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to the consultation on additional salmon fishery conservation measures, (i) when the draft terms of reference of the consultation will be presented to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure; (ii) how the framework will be established and what it will contain; and (iii) how the consultation will be communicated to the general public.

**(AQW 10085/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:**

- (i) The Department is at an advanced stage on the development of the consultation on salmon conservation measures and details will be forwarded to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure in the following weeks.
- (ii) The consultation will contain a range of options for control of the exploitation of wilds Atlantic salmon by both commercial fishermen and recreational anglers. The range of options is based on scientific analysis carried out by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute.
- (iii) The consultation will be communicated to the public through stakeholder groups, the NI Angling website and the press. It is planned that the consultation will be web based and arrangements will be in place to enable those without internet access to participate.

### **Capital/Revenue Costs: Departmental Spend**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an estimate of the annual additional cost to her Department of providing its services in our divided society, broken down by (i) capital; and (ii) revenue costs.

**(AQW 10091/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Due to the number of variables involved, it is not possible for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to calculate the annual additional cost of service delivery.

### **CPR: Staff Training**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what strategy is in place to train departmental staff in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

**(AQW 10162/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Under the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations (NI) 1982, DCAL as an employer must train suitable first-aiders in the workplace who have undergone training from an approved organisation and received a certificate confirming this. There are currently 37 staff in DCAL who have received this training which includes Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). The Department has arrangements in place to ensure certificates are up-to-date and refresher training is arranged as appropriate.

### **Special Adviser: Resignation**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) when her former Special Adviser left her post; (ii) to outline the process by which she left the post; and (iii) whether she received a severance package.

**(AQW 10185/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** I advised the Department that my Special Adviser resigned from her post on 19 March 2012. In these circumstances, under the Code of Practice for the Appointment of Special Advisers, a severance package is not applicable.

### **Special Adviser: Cost to Public Purse**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what was the total cost to the public purse of her former Special Adviser's tenure.

**(AQW 10189/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Special Adviser referred to was appointed on 16 May 2011 and was placed on pay band B of the Special Adviser pay scale, that is, within the range £57,300 to £90,000. Employer National Insurance and Superannuation costs have also been paid in accordance with the appropriate scheme guidance.

## Salmon Hatchery in the Classroom Project

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department has any plans to replicate or adopt the 'salmon in the classroom' project, which was recently delivered by the Rivers Agency, to schools across Northern Ireland to highlight and educate school children about the importance of salmon in our rivers.

**(AQW 10195/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** It is my understanding that the Rivers Agency has not been involved in the delivery of the Salmon Hatchery in the Classroom Project.

My Department currently supports the Salmon Hatchery in the Classroom Project, which is an education programme aimed at Controlled and Maintained Primary Schools located in the same towns and villages in the Lower Bann catchment area.

The Department supplies the schools with salmon eggs from the Department's River Bush Salmon Station. The Department also allocates staff time (technical, industrial and administrative) to school visits to the Bushmills Salmon Station, which is an integral part of the project. The children are given a tour of the facilities by DCAL staff and learn more about the life cycle of the wild Atlantic salmon.

## Special Adviser: Job Description

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in regard to the appointment of her current Special Adviser, to detail (i) the job description deployed; (ii) the person specification; (iii) how the vacancy was made known; (iv) how many candidates were considered; (v) the criteria against which candidates were judged; (vi) what regard was given to avoiding any imbalance of religious belief; and (vii) what documentation exists pertaining to the appointment.

**(AQW 10240/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The DCAL Special Adviser was appointed in accordance with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as amended.

## Special Adviser: Appointment

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) who is her current Special Adviser; (ii) when and how he was appointed; (iii) when he took up office; and (iv) within which salary band he is being paid.

**(AQW 10241/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** Jarlath Kearney was appointed Special Adviser in DCAL on 2 April 2012.

The Special Adviser was appointed in accordance with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as amended.

The salary of DCAL's Special Adviser has yet to be finalised.

## Special Adviser: Permanent Secretary Notification

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in regard to the appointment of her current Special Adviser, when and how the Permanent Secretary was informed of the Minister's choice.

**(AQW 10242/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The Permanent Secretary was notified orally by me of the intended appointment of my current Special Adviser on Tuesday 13th March 2012.

## Special Adviser: Vetting

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in regard to the appointment of her current Special Adviser, whether any vetting or character checking was applied to the appointed person, including details of how, when and by whom.

**(AQW 10243/11-15)**

**Ms Ní Chuilín:** The DCAL Special Adviser was appointed in accordance with the Code of Practice on the Appointment of Special Advisers and the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as amended.

# Department of Education

## Cycling Proficiency Scheme

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education what percentage of primary school children have completed the Cycling Proficiency Scheme.

**(AQW 9669/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education):** The Cycling Proficiency Scheme is operated by the Department of the Environment and I understand is aimed primarily at pupils in Year 7, although some schools do offer the scheme to pupils in other year groups in Key Stage 2.

DoE has advised that, during the 2010-11 academic year 575 primary schools participated in the scheme. We do not hold information on the precise number of pupils who participated.

There is also an opportunity for pupils who have not completed the scheme and who are aged 9 or over to take a Cycling Proficiency Test. Figures from DoE show that, during the 2010-11 academic year 8,670 pupils took the test. This represents 19.7% of those pupils aged 9 and over in primary schools in 2010/11.

Note:

- 1 Information on numbers of pupils who sat the test provided by DOE, who have a statutory responsibility for road safety education.
- 2 Total eligible pupils taken as those pupils in primary schools and preparatory departments of grammar schools aged 9 or more at 1 July 2010.

### Teachers: Cost of Substitutes

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of substitute teachers in each of the last five years, broken down by (i) sector; and (ii) Education and Library Board.

**(AQW 9885/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The cost of substitute teachers in each of the last five financial years, broken down by (i) sector; and (ii) Education and Library Board is detailed in the attached table.

|                      | 2006-07               | 2007-08               | 2008-09               | 2009-10               | 2010-11               |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Belfast</b>       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
| Controlled           | 4,538,220.23          | 5,313,751.12          | 5,566,337.11          | 5,059,799.92          | 5,201,793.26          |
| Maintained           | 4,064,754.84          | 4,749,935.06          | 5,242,218.58          | 4,932,063.76          | 4,357,979.06          |
| GMI                  | 333,690.79            | 337,960.08            | 371,188.86            | 353,635.94            | 287,711.71            |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>£8,936,665.86</b>  | <b>£10,401,646.26</b> | <b>£11,179,744.55</b> | <b>£10,345,499.62</b> | <b>£9,847,484.03</b>  |
| <b>North Eastern</b> |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
| Controlled           | 8,077,705.22          | 9,034,048.94          | 10,130,238.82         | 9,310,929.85          | 8,883,702.63          |
| Maintained           | 3,315,694.76          | 3,691,224.50          | 4,211,609.63          | 4,403,572.94          | 4,165,170.04          |
| GMI                  | 488,464.44            | 618,757.86            | 671,127.92            | 504,237.87            | 675,139.54            |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>£11,881,864.42</b> | <b>£13,344,031.30</b> | <b>£15,012,976.37</b> | <b>£14,218,740.66</b> | <b>£13,724,012.21</b> |
| <b>South Eastern</b> |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
| Controlled           | 6,502,737.39          | 7,269,713.34          | 8,649,782.89          | 8,690,712.40          | 8,728,714.15          |
| Maintained           | 2,800,966.43          | 3,296,520.57          | 3,747,126.04          | 3,891,732.28          | 3,567,152.88          |
| GMI                  | 439,102.37            | 562,855.09            | 783,007.23            | 937,788.16            | 841,702.02            |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>£9,742,806.19</b>  | <b>£11,129,089.00</b> | <b>£13,179,916.16</b> | <b>£13,520,232.84</b> | <b>£13,137,569.05</b> |
| <b>Southern</b>      |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
| Controlled           | 5,323,085.96          | 5,718,332.53          | 6,344,979.79          | 5,794,931.28          | 5,906,347.94          |
| Maintained           | 6,466,053.79          | 7,337,685.85          | 8,286,440.64          | 8,684,070.35          | 8,448,643.77          |
| GMI                  | 509,969.37            | 484,216.53            | 446,534.23            | 498,684.14            | 444,631.08            |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>£12,299,109.12</b> | <b>£13,540,234.91</b> | <b>£15,077,954.66</b> | <b>£14,977,685.77</b> | <b>£14,799,622.79</b> |
| <b>Western</b>       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
| Controlled           | 4,179,420.52          | 4,218,751.80          | 4,255,236.72          | 4,030,922.83          | 3,651,723.23          |
| Maintained           | 5,218,243.98          | 6,045,656.84          | 6,887,420.06          | 6,475,495.32          | 5,859,175.42          |

|                    | 2006-07               | 2007-08               | 2008-09               | 2009-10               | 2010-11               |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| GMI                | 478,471.58            | 484,125.50            | 482,240.68            | 408,023.29            | 407,236.50            |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>£9,876,136.08</b>  | <b>£10,748,534.14</b> | <b>£11,624,897.46</b> | <b>£10,914,441.44</b> | <b>£9,918,135.15</b>  |
| <b>Grand Total</b> | <b>£52,736,581.67</b> | <b>£59,163,535.61</b> | <b>£66,075,489.20</b> | <b>£63,976,600.33</b> | <b>£61,426,823.23</b> |

\* Figures are net of employers' ERNI and Superannuation

### Buses: Use outside of School Year

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 9227/11-15, for a breakdown of the all-year-round youth activities for which the buses are used; and how frequently the buses are used outside the 38 week school year. **(AQW 9902/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The all-year-round youth activities for which buses are used include: camping, scouting, youth hostelling, outdoor pursuits, girl-guiding, outdoor education programmes, and attendance at sports such as ice skating, bowling, horse riding, swimming, orienteering, hill walking, canoeing, and rock climbing, as well as trips to cultural activities and venues, community based activities and many other youth work curriculum-based projects, youth work programmes, visits and residential schemes. The combination of these activities is unique to each Board.

I have been advised by Education and Library Boards that data relating to the frequency of Board bus use is available for only some of the Boards and for only some of the activities listed. The figures quoted below for buses used outside the 38 week school period are for 2011.

#### BELB

- (a) 29 buses supported special school summer schemes at six schools for periods ranging from one to three weeks in July and August.
- (b) 80 school trips to youth outdoor pursuit centres.
- (c) 5 buses to support a range of activities from those listed above.

#### NEELB

- (a) 44 buses, each for a two week period to support a number of special and mainstream school summer schemes in July and August.
- (b) 22 buses to support other youth related trips.

#### SELB

246 youth trips conducted during the period July to August.

#### SEELB

196 youth trips in July and August.

#### WELB

An average of 48 trips per week during the months of July and August, excluding summer schemes for special schools.

### Papers for Assembly Committees

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education to detail all occasions in the last 12 months when his Department has made a presentation to an Assembly committee and provided papers pertaining to that presentation to the committee less than 48 hours beforehand.

**(AQW 9928/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The details of papers provided by the Department to Assembly committees less than 48 hours beforehand are detailed in the table below:

| Date of Committee Meeting | Issue Date of Paper(s)     |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 June 2011               | 31 May 2011                |
| 29 June 2011              | 27 June 2011               |
| 3 October 2011            | 3 October 2011             |
| 12 October 2011           | 11 October 2011 (2 papers) |
| 7 December 2011           | 6 December 2011 (2 papers) |
| 14 December 2011          | 14 December 2011           |

| Date of Committee Meeting | Issue Date of Paper(s) |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 22 February 2012          | 20 February 2012       |
| 29 February 2012          | 28 February 2012       |

### Away-days and Team-building Exercises: Cost-effectiveness

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Education how his Department assesses the cost-effectiveness of away-days and team-building exercises.

**(AQW 9948/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** In the Department of Education, away days in the main are used for Business Planning purposes. As an Investor in People it is important to involve people when developing the organisation's business plan and when agreeing team and individual objectives. The Department seeks to use venues where costs are minimal or nil. Where costs cannot be avoided, the Department would secure a competitive rate.

Where team-building exercises are undertaken, these are normally within the terms of the Department's Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) policy and are arranged in consultation with the Voluntary Service Bureau (VSB) at nil cost. Team objectives are set prior to undertaking the volunteering activity to inform the evaluation process.

### Education and Skills Authority: Legislation

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the key stages completed on the current Bill to establish the Education and Skills Authority; and the timescale and scope for a public consultation on the Bill.

**(AQW 9955/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Subject to Executive agreement, I intend to introduce the Bill in the Assembly in the very near future. As there has already been extensive public consultation on the policy proposals, I do not intend to consult on the Bill.

The Bill will go through normal Assembly scrutiny and debate.

### CPR Training: Teachers

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Education what strategy is in place to train staff in schools in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

**(AQW 9968/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The following strategies are in place to train staff in schools in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

Schools in BELB and SEELB board areas:

The BELB and SEELB provide a comprehensive First Aid training package for both teaching and non-teaching staff and Cardiopulmonary resuscitation is an integral part of these Training courses.

Schools in WELB, SELB and NEELB board areas:

Schools in the WELB, SELB and NEELB areas use the "Heartstart Schools Programme" in partnership with the British Heart Foundation (BHF), which includes training staff on key medical emergencies:

- How to recognise the signs & symptoms of a Heart Attack
- How to deal with an unconscious casualty who is breathing (Recovery position)
- How to deal with an unconscious casualty who is NOT breathing (CPR)
- How to deal with a casualty who is severely bleeding
- How to deal with a casualty who is choking.
- Emergency Life Support
- Coronary Heart Disease
- The Four Stage Approach
- Infection Control Protocol

In all Board areas, The Board's Health and Safety Manual for Principals and Governors includes specific guidance on First Aid, stipulates the level and number of first aiders required and reminds schools of the requirement to have staff trained in First Aid, including CPR.

I have arranged for a copy of the full BHF "Heartstart Programme" and the BELB/SEELB Provision of First Aid Training Courses contract, to be placed in the Assembly library.

### School Principals: Panel

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 8475/11-15, whether the Department made an agreement, before he came into office, to establish a panel of school principals.

**(AQW 10018/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** My Department has not made an agreement to establish a panel of school principals. My intention is to support new and existing representative bodies for the various school sectors, which may include school principals.

### Schools: Formal Intervention in NEELB Area

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Education which post-primary schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area are under formal intervention; and what additional support has been (i) offered to; (ii) accepted by; and (iii) delivered at each school.

**(AQW 10042/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** In the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) area the following post-primary schools are currently in the Formal Intervention Process (FIP): Ballee Community High School (CHS); Crumlin Integrated College (IC); and Cambridge House Grammar School (GS). One further school is in the process of entering the FIP and preparing an action plan, and I will write to the member regarding that school before the inspection report is published.

The purpose of the FIP is to provide the school with the support and guidance it needs to improve. When a school enters the FIP the Department writes to instruct the local Education and Library Board (ELB) to work with the school to develop and implement an action plan to address the areas for improvement identified during the inspection.

This action plan will include details of the type and level of support to be provided by the ELB. The action plan is agreed between the school and the ELB before being submitted to the Department, to be quality assured by the ETI. Therefore the support offered by the ELB, accepted by the school and subsequently delivered by the Board is detailed in the agreed action plan. The ETI monitor the implementation of the action plan and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement detailed in the inspection report.

The NEELB has advised that it has provided support to Ballee CHS, Crumlin IC and Cambridge GS as detailed below:

#### Ballee CHS

|   |
|---|
| Continuous Link Officer support and guidance for the Principal and the Senior Leadership Team.  |
| Link officer support for action planning after initial inspection, monitoring visits and follow-up inspection and subsequent coordination of the support programme.             |
| Support for Governors including training and attendance at meetings.  |
| Training for Senior Leadership Team and Middle Managers.  |
| Whole staff in-service training programmes in the areas of Quality Learning and Teaching, Data Analysis and Target Setting, Special Educational Needs and Behaviour Management. |
| Specialist subject support and/or in-service training for Maths, English, Science, SEN, Library, Data Management, ICT, Languages, Music, School Council.                        |
| Demonstration Lessons, Team teaching, actual subject teaching in English and Maths.   |
| Support from other schools in the Ballymena Learning Community, particularly to raise standards in English at GCSE.   |
| Provision of a Multi-disciplinary team including the additional NEELB services of Psychology, Behaviour, Youth and EWO.   |
| In total, in excess of 500 hours of support has been given by 23 CASS officers.   |

#### Crumlin IC

|   |
|---|
| Continuous Link Officer support and guidance for the Acting Principal and the Senior Leadership Team.   |
| Link officer support for action planning after the initial inspection, monitoring visits and follow-up inspection and subsequent coordination of the support programme. |
| Secondment of an experienced Principal to lead the school in the initial phase.   |
| Coordination and delivery of support to the unsatisfactory Principal.   |
| Coordination and delivery of support to the unsatisfactory Vice-Principal.  |
| Support for Governors including training, attendance at meetings and advice in areas such as HR and Budgetary Management.   |

|   |
|---|
| Whole staff in-service training programmes in the areas of Leadership and Management, Quality Learning and Teaching, Pastoral Care and Special Educational Needs. |
|---|

|   |
|---|
| Specialist subject support and/or in-service training for Maths, Literacy, SEN, Library, Data Management, CEIAG, ICT, LLW, School Council, Induction and Music. |
|---|

|   |
|---|
| In total, in excess of 500 hours of support has been given by 20 CASS officers. |
|---|

### Cambridge House GS

|   |
|---|
| Continuous Link Officer support and guidance for Acting Principal and Senior Leadership Team. |
|---|

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|---|
| Link officer support for action planning after the initial inspection and the monitoring visit with subsequent coordination of the support programme. |
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| Engagement of an experienced Principal as a mentor to the Acting Principal and Senior Leadership Team to progress the action plans to address areas for improvement. |
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|--|
| Facilitating the support of experienced Principals and middle leaders to share good practice in the areas of raising standards at sixth form, monitoring classroom practice, CEIAG, and data management. |
|--|

|   |
|---|
| Support for Governors including training, attendance at meetings and advice in areas such as HR and Budgetary Management. |
|---|

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| Facilitating the support of C2K to implement tracking systems and train staff. |
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|  |
|--|
| Whole staff in-service training for the action planning process. |
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|--|
| Middle leader in-service training in the areas of roles and responsibilities and departmental monitoring and evaluation. |
|--|

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|--|
| Specialist subject support for CEIAG, Maths, English, and Induction. |
|--|

|  |
|--|
| In total, in excess of 150 hours of support has been given by 8 CASS officers. |
|--|

### Educational Psychologists: Vacancies

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the current number of vacancies for educational psychologists in the (a) Belfast Education and Library Board; and (b) South Eastern Education and Library Board; and (ii) when the vacancies were created. **(AQW 10051/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** I have been advised by the Chief Executives as follows:

(i)(a)

There are no vacancies in the Belfast Education and Library Board educational psychology service.

(i)(b)

There are 5 vacant educational psychologist posts in the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

- (ii)
- 1 post vacant since October 2010
  - 1 post vacant since August 2011
  - 2 posts vacant since November 2011
  - 1 post vacant since February 2012

In November 2011 the Board undertook a recruitment exercise which resulted in the filling of 3 posts. The Board will be advertising the remaining vacant posts in the very near future.

### Coláiste Feirste, Belfast: Transport Arrangements

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education for his Department's assessment of the recent ruling in relation to Coláiste Feirste, Belfast. **(AQW 10105/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** As indicated in my reply to AQW 6276/11-15, published in the Official Report on 27 January 2012, this is a significant and important judgment which requires careful and detailed consideration before I can be in a position to provide an overall assessment on the outcome.

In line with the court judgment, Department officials have been re-examining the transport arrangements for all pupils travelling to Coláiste Feirste, a process which has involved consultative discussions with the school. This re-examination process is at an advanced stage and will in the near future bring recommendations to me for consideration.

### Schools: Gaelic Games

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education what percentage of (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools in each sector offer Gaelic games as part of Physical Education.

**(AQW 10108/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** 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.

The Department does not collect information on the individual sports or games provided by each school.

### Schools: Irish Language

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education what percentage of (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools in each sector offer Irish language as a subject at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5.

**(AQW 10109/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Modern languages are a statutory requirement at Key Stage 3, and a qualification choice at Key Stage 4 and sixth form. Schools can choose to deliver any of the languages of the 27 EU member states, including Irish. However, it is up to individual schools to decide which languages they choose to offer to meet the needs of their pupils.

The Department does not hold information on the languages schools choose to teach in Primary Schools or Post-Primary schools. However, we do have information on Key Stage 2 & 3 assessments in Irish returns for 2010/11 and examination entries for Irish in 2010/11 and this is detailed in the tables below:

#### Key Stage 2 Assessment in Irish Language

| Management Type             | Total Schools | Number of schools with assessment results in Irish | % of schools |
|-----------------------------|---------------|--|--------------|
| Controlled                  | 381           | 1  | 0.3          |
| Voluntary                   | 14            | 0  | 0.0          |
| Catholic Maintained         | 393           | 10   | 2.5          |
| Other Maintained            | 21            | 18   | 85.7         |
| Controlled Integrated       | 19            | 0  | 0.0          |
| Grant Maintained Integrated | 23            | 0  | 0.0          |
| <b>Totals</b>               | <b>851</b>    | <b>29</b>  | <b>3.4</b>   |

#### Key Stage 3 Assessment in Irish Language

| Management Type             | Total Schools | Number of schools with assessment results in Irish | % of schools |
|-----------------------------|---------------|--|--------------|
| Controlled                  | 71            | 0  | 0.0          |
| Voluntary                   | 50            | 0  | 0.0          |
| Catholic Maintained         | 71            | 1  | 1.4          |
| Other Maintained            | 1             | 1  | 100.0        |
| Controlled Integrated       | 5             | 0  | 0.0          |
| Grant Maintained Integrated | 15            | 1  | 6.7          |
| <b>Totals</b>               | <b>213</b>    | <b>3</b>   | <b>1.4</b>   |



**2010/11 GCSE Irish Entries**

| Management Type             | Total Schools | Number of Entries | Number of schools | % of schools |
|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Controlled                  | 70            | 0                 | 0                 | 0            |
| Voluntary                   | 51            | 1016              | 29                | 56.9         |
| Catholic Maintained         | 71            | 619               | 34                | 47.9         |
| Other Maintained            | 1             | 0                 | 0                 | 0            |
| Controlled Integrated       | 5             | 0                 | 0                 | 0            |
| Grant Maintained Integrated | 15            | 21                | 3                 | 20.0         |
| <b>Totals</b>               | <b>213</b>    | <b>1656</b>       | <b>66</b>         | <b>31.0</b>  |

**2010/11 GCSE Gaelge Entries**

| Management Type             | Total Schools | Number of Entries | Number of schools | % of schools |
|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Controlled                  | 70            | 0                 | 0                 | 0            |
| Voluntary                   | 51            | 19                | 2                 | 3.9          |
| Catholic Maintained         | 71            | 28                | 3                 | 4.2          |
| Other Maintained            | 1             | 69                | 1                 | 100          |
| Controlled Integrated       | 5             | 0                 | 0                 | 0            |
| Grant Maintained Integrated | 15            | 2                 | 1                 | 6.7          |
| <b>Totals</b>               | <b>213</b>    | <b>118</b>        | <b>7</b>          | <b>3.3</b>   |

**2010/11 Irish GCE 'A' Level Entries**

| Management Type             | Total Schools | Number of Entries | Number of schools | % of schools |
|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Controlled                  | 50            | 1                 | 1                 | 2.0          |
| Voluntary                   | 51            | 208               | 28                | 54.9         |
| Catholic Maintained         | 52            | 62                | 18                | 34.6         |
| Other Maintained            | 1             | 46                | 1                 | 100          |
| Controlled Integrated       | 2             | 0                 | 0                 | 0            |
| Grant Maintained Integrated | 14            | 2                 | 2                 | 14.3         |
| <b>Totals</b>               | <b>170</b>    | <b>319</b>        | <b>49</b>         | <b>28.8</b>  |

To support primary schools wishing to deliver language learning the Primary Language Programme was introduced in 2007 to give pupils at Foundation Stage/Key Stage 1 the opportunity to learn an additional language in school. The programme offers primary schools the opportunity to work with peripatetic language tutors to deliver Irish, Spanish and Polish. As at 20 March 2012, 92 primary schools are learning Irish through this programme, 91 of which are from the Maintained sector and 1 from the Grant Maintained Integrated sector.

In addition, we have also commissioned an Irish language primary pilot programme for pupils in Key Stage 2 which aims to build upon and complement the provision made available via the Primary Languages Programme. The programme involves 10 primary schools from the Maintained sector in the Derry/North West area and will run for 4 years.

**Capital Assets: Disposal**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Education to list the capital assets that his Department intends to dispose of in each of the next three years.

**(AQW 10113/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Publicly-owned properties in the education estate fall within the Controlled sector and are owned by Education and Library Boards. Properties in other sectors are owned by Trustees and the disposal of those properties is the Trustees' responsibility.

While Boards are obliged to dispose of surplus property within 3 years of a school closure the determining factor in trying to realise capital receipts has tended to be the lack of market interest.

Currently planned disposals by Education and Library Boards in each of the next three years are listed below.

| <b>Board</b> | <b>Asset Name</b>  | <b>2012/13 Value (£)</b> | <b>2013/14 Value (£)</b> | <b>2014/15 Value (£)</b> |
|--------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| BELB         | Land at Orangefield  |                          | 75,000                   |                          |
| BELB         | Belfast School of Music                                      |                          | 120,000                  |                          |
| BELB         | Grove Primary School   | 130,000                  |                          |                          |
| BELB         | Former Forthriver Primary School Site                        |                          | 75,000                   |                          |
| BELB         | Mersey Street Primary School                                 | 45,000                   |                          |                          |
| BELB         | Laburnum Playing Fields lease                                |                          | 20,000                   |                          |
| BELB         | Former caretaker's residence 243 Ballygomartin Road, Belfast | 20,000                   |                          |                          |
| BELB         | Newtownbreda Primary School                                  | 450,000                  |                          |                          |
| BELB         | Trinity Drop-in Centre                                       | 61,000                   |                          |                          |
| BELB         | Sydenham Youth Club  | 85,000                   |                          |                          |
| BELB         | Shankill Youth Club  | 65,000                   |                          |                          |
| BELB         | Mount Gilbert College  |                          |                          | 1,250,000                |
| BELB         | Land at Kircubbin Sailing Club                               |                          | 5,000                    |                          |
| BELB         | Turf lodge Youth Club  | 35,000                   |                          |                          |
| BELB         | Land at Donegall Pass Youth Club                             |                          | 25,000                   |                          |
| NEELB        | Land at Carnalridge Primary School                           | 15,000                   |                          |                          |
| NEELB        | Ballee Primary School  |                          | 100,000                  |                          |
| NEELB        | Antiville Primary School                                     |                          | 200,000                  |                          |
| NEELB        | Roddensvale School   |                          | 75,000                   |                          |
| NEELB        | Ballypriormore Primary School                                |                          | 50,000                   |                          |
| NEELB        | Ballymoney Music Centre                                      |                          | 100,000                  |                          |
| NEELB        | Glenarm Primary School                                       |                          | 100,000                  |                          |
| SEELB        | 2 Donard Street, Newcastle                                   |                          | 85,000                   |                          |
| SEELB        | 4 Donard Street, Newcastle                                   |                          | 40,000                   |                          |
| SEELB        | 24 Cabra Towers Newry (Former Outdoor Education Centre)      | 130,000                  |                          |                          |
| SEELB        | Lower Ballinderry Primary School                             |                          | 125,000                  |                          |
| SEELB        | 22 Pond Park Road  |                          | 150,000                  |                          |
| SEELB        | 44 Ballylesson Road  | 10,000                   |                          |                          |
| SEELB        | Kindle Primary School Ballykinler                            |                          | 70,000                   |                          |
| SEELB        | Land at Good Shepherd Road, Lisburn                          |                          | 230,000                  |                          |
| SEELB        | Land at Clifton Special School, Ballykillaire, Bangor        | 750,000                  |                          |                          |
| SEELB        | Killard Special School, Newtownards                          | 400,000                  |                          |                          |
| SELB         | Tullymacarette Primary School                                |                          | 30,000                   |                          |

| Board | Asset Name                                 | 2012/13 Value (£) | 2013/14 Value (£) | 2014/15 Value (£) |
|-------|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| SELB  | Play area at Toberlane Primary School      |                   | 4,000             |                   |
| SELB  | Playing Field at Collone Primary School    |                   | 47,500            |                   |
| SELB  | Playing Field at Annaghmore Primary School |                   | 30,000            |                   |
| WELB  | Burnfoot Primary School                    |                   | 100,000           |                   |
| WELB  | Faughan Valley High School (Lisneal)       |                   | 250,000           |                   |
| WELB  | Duke of Westminster High School, Kesh      |                   | 300,000           |                   |

### Area-based Planning

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Education what action his Department intends to take to ensure that any proposals submitted by communities outside the formal area planning process will receive a fair hearing compared with the proposals submitted by statutory agencies.

**(AQW 10126/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The area planning process is an important driver for achieving my Department's vision for education which is to ensure that every learner fulfils their full potential at each stage of development.

I encourage everyone to embrace the Area Planning process and to engage fully in the consultation exercise which will provide schools, parents, wider communities and others with the opportunity to comment and present their views and alternatives before plans are finalised. I want to stress that there will be no alternative area plans to those drawn up, consulted and agreed upon through the Area Planning process. There will therefore be no scope for proposals to be considered outside the Area Planning process.

I will continue to make my decisions on all Development Proposals taking account of the merits and issues pertinent to each individual case and mindful of my Department's policies and priorities.

### Schools: Financial Deficits

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Education what action his Department intends to take to address the issue of the outstanding deficits that schools have accrued to allow such schools to move forward with agreed amalgamations with other schools.

**(AQW 10127/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Under the current Common Funding Scheme arrangements, any budget deficits will be met from Funding Authority centre funds providing that each of the Board of Governors involved, in conjunction with the Employing Authority, can demonstrate that in preparing the school for amalgamation it complied with any requirements, direction or advice issued by the Funding Authority.

Funding Authorities should work closely with schools, and CCMS in the case of Catholic maintained schools, in the period leading up to amalgamation to ensure that appropriate decisions are taken, effective financial monitoring arrangements are in place and the risk of significant deficits minimised.

In this respect, amalgamating schools should, as early as possible, draw up an Amalgamation Implementation Plan which should include details of the various financial actions to be addressed in the period prior to the amalgamation.

### Schools: Enrolment Figures

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the approved, maximum, and current enrolment number (a) at each school; and (b) in each Education and Library Board area; and (ii) any differences in the figures provided for (a) each school; (b) each Board; and (c) the overall total.

**(AQW 10128/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The information requested has been placed in the Assembly Library.

### Schools: Hurling

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education what percentage of (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools in each sector offer hurling as part of Physical Education.

**(AQW 10150/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** 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.

The Department does not collect information on the individual sports or games provided by each school.

### **Education Systems: Best Performing**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education whether he has carried out an assessment of the education systems in other countries that have broken the link between socio-economic background and educational underachievement; and if so, what lessons could be learnt.

**(AQW 10157/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** International evidence, in the form of the PISA 2009 results, shows that the best performing school systems manage to provide high-quality education to all students.

PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices Vol IV, reports that "successful school systems - those that perform above average and show below-average socio-economic inequalities - provide all students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, with similar opportunities to learn. Systems that show high performance and an equitable distribution of learning outcomes tend to be comprehensive, requiring teachers and schools to embrace diverse student populations through personalised educational pathways. In contrast, school systems that assume that students have different destinations with different expectations and differentiation in terms of how they are placed in schools, classes and grades often show less equitable outcomes without an overall performance advantage."

A previous OECD Policy Brief Ten Steps to Equity in Education looked at how to improve equity in education in three key policy areas: the design of the education systems, practices both in and out of school, and resourcing. The report cautions against streaming or academic selection as this can increase inequalities and inequities particularly if it takes place early in the education process. This is also reported in the latest OECD (2012) report 'Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools' which states that selection widens achievement gaps and inequities and that pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds are the group most adversely affected by selection.

I want all our young people to achieve to their full potential. Therefore, I want to drive out the inequities that exist in our education system and end academic selection.

The OECD Policy Brief also recommends strengthening the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn. I want to stress the value of education and work with local communities to ensure young people receive positive messages about the importance of doing well at school and are encouraged to have high expectations.

I am equally determined to take action to break the link between social disadvantage and educational underachievement - through encouraging schools to set high expectations for their pupils and supporting and, where necessary, challenging schools to improve.

### **Middletown Centre for Autism: Research**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education what research is currently being undertaken at the Middletown Centre for Autism.  
**(AQW 10158/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Middletown Centre is currently undertaking four areas of research:

- 1 A pilot study in mainstream schools across north and south to assess the working memory of children on the autism spectrum.
- 2 An all-Ireland project to research the sensory processing difficulties of children aged 4-11 on the autism spectrum.
- 3 A research bulletin targeted at both parents and professional is being developed on this issue of social communication for those children on the autism spectrum.
- 4 A series of case studies based upon the children receiving intensive trans-disciplinary support from the Centre in the north.

### **Middletown Centre for Autism: Services**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Education how his Department intends to increase awareness of the services provided by the Middletown Centre for Autism.

**(AQW 10159/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Primary responsibility for the promotion and advertising of the Middletown Centre for Autism is delegated to the Centre in order to ensure a consistent approach across the north and south.

To facilitate such promotion, the Department of Education has recently authorised the Centre to use the C2k system to promote its support and services in schools. C2k will also enable the Centre to provide online learning for schools and will enable online learning materials to be provided.

### Primary Schools: Enrolments

**Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Education whether the temporary variation in enrolment numbers for primary schools is quantified by the number of pupils or the percentage of pupils attending a school.

**(AQW 10160/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Requests from primary schools to the Department for temporary variations to increase enrolment and/or admissions numbers are considered on an individual basis and are not quantified by the number of pupils or the percentage of pupils attending a school.

A school will request a temporary variation for the total number of additional places it requires. In consideration of this request the Department takes into account factors including:-

- (1) the teaching accommodation available for use by pupils, to be satisfied that the school could deliver the statutory curriculum effectively to all its pupils;
- (2) the availability of places in other schools within reasonable travelling distance of the address(es) of the child(ren) for whom additional place(s) are being sought; and
- (3) the statutory requirement that all classes in Foundation and Key Stage 1 (Years 1 to 4) are limited to a maximum of 30 pupils - except where an exception is approved by an Education and Library Board.

In considering all such requests, the Department will consult with, and take into account the views of, the appropriate Education and Library Board and (in the case of catholic maintained schools) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

### Capital/Revenue Costs: Departmental Spend

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of the annual additional cost to his Department of providing its services in our divided society, broken down by (i) capital; and (ii) revenue costs.

**(AQW 10168/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Due to the number of variables involved, it is not possible for the Department of Education to calculate the annual additional cost of service delivery.

### Special Educational Needs Review: Reference Groups

**Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Education to outline the agreed process which led to organisations being invited to the Special Educational Needs Review Reference Groups.

**(AQW 10183/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** In January 2012, I published a Summary Report of Responses to the Consultation on Every School a Good School - The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion and the associated Equality Impact Assessment. In the Ministerial foreword to the report I stated that I had asked Departmental officials to further engage with parents, schools and other stakeholders to discuss how best the policy proposals as outlined in the foreword could be progressed.

As part of this engagement, a series of reference group meetings was arranged in each Education and Library Board area, inviting a mixture of voluntary organisations, schools and parents. The voluntary organisations invited were those which had responded to the consultation and/or had contacted the Department concerning the Review of SEN and Inclusion, or were known to have a particular interest in SEN issues. Invitations were initially sent to schools, selected at random from those which had responded to the consultation, in order to provide representation from each school sector – early years, primary, post primary and special schools, maintained, controlled, integrated, Irish medium and grammar school sectors across the boards. The parents who were invited included those who had been in contact with the Department in the past 2 years regarding a SEN issue or were chosen at random from parents who had responded to the original consultation, according to the board area in which they lived. Those voluntary organisations invited were also given the opportunity to bring along parent representatives.

The purpose of the reference groups was to hold small meetings with interested stakeholders to provide an update on my key proposals and to explore suggestions as to how these could best be taken forward. The participants in the meetings were asked if they would be willing to participate in future meetings to examine any issues that may arise with the implementation of the proposals. It was felt that these meetings could provide a forum to keep stakeholders informed of developments and to continue to seek their input.

The process and timescales for the Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion are as follows:

May 2012 - SEN and Inclusion Policy Memorandum to Education Committee;

August 2012 - Final Equality Impact Assessment;

September 2012 - SEN and Inclusion Policy Memorandum to other Departments and the Executive;

December 2012 - Legislation drafted for Ministerial clearance, including primary and subordinate legislation;

October 2013 - Assembly process from Bill clearance through to Royal Assent; and

September 2015 - Transitional arrangements, including development of revised code of practice and associated guidance.

### Special Educational Needs Review: Reference Groups

**Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the purpose of the Special Educational Needs Review Reference Groups; and (ii) whether there are any plans for further engagement on the Special Educational Needs proposals.  
(AQW 10197/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** In January 2012, I published a Summary Report of Responses to the Consultation on Every School a Good School - The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion and the associated Equality Impact Assessment. In the Ministerial foreword to the report I stated that I had asked Departmental officials to further engage with parents, schools and other stakeholders to discuss how best the policy proposals as outlined in the foreword could be progressed.

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### Special Educational Needs Review: Reference Groups

**Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Education to detail the process and timescale that the Special Educational Needs Review Reference Groups are working towards in relation to primary legislation, Statutory Rules, guidance, and equality.  
(AQW 10198/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** In January 2012, I published a Summary Report of Responses to the Consultation on Every School a Good School - The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion and the associated Equality Impact Assessment. In the Ministerial foreword to the report I stated that I had asked Departmental officials to further engage with parents, schools and other stakeholders to discuss how best the policy proposals as outlined in the foreword could be progressed.

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### Child Protection Clearance: Substitute Teachers

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Education what is the average waiting time for a new teacher on the substitute register to achieve child protection clearance; and whether this delay affects the placement of substitute teachers in schools.

**(AQW 10226/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Access NI aims to deliver 90% of correctly completed applications for Enhanced Disclosure Checks within four weeks of receipt. For requests made between September 2011 and February 2012 the average time for a check to be returned to the NI Substitute Teachers Register (NISTR) was 25 days.

In certain circumstances an enhanced disclosure check is not required for a teacher to join NISTR. This is the case for: newly qualified teachers from teacher training colleges in the north of Ireland who apply to join NISTR within three months of completing their training; teachers joining directly from previous teaching service in the north of Ireland provided that the relevant employing authority can confirm that the individual has previously been vetted; part-time teachers wishing to join NISTR to undertake substitute teaching outside of their normal contracted hours; and teachers with an Enhanced Disclosure Certificate dated within the last three months.

### Enrolment Figures: NEELB

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Education to detail the maximum enrolment number for each (i) primary school; and (ii) post-primary school in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area.

**(AQW 10227/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The maximum enrolment number for each primary school and post-primary school in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area for the 2011/12 school year are as detailed in the attached tables.

(i)

#### North Eastern Education and Library Board Primary School Approved Enrolment Numbers

| School name                                     | Approved Enrolment Number |
|---|---------------------------|
| Abbots Cross Primary School                     | 523                       |
| Acorn Integrated Primary School                 | 203                       |
| Altayeskey Primary School                       | 46                        |
| Ampertaine Primary School                       | 138                       |
| Anahorish Primary School                        | 174                       |
| Antrim Primary School                           | 600                       |
| Armoy Primary School                            | 116                       |
| Ashgrove Primary School                         | 374                       |
| Ballycarry Primary School                       | 174                       |
| Ballycastle Integrated Primary                  | 158                       |
| Ballyclare Primary School                       | 572                       |
| Ballycraigy Primary School                      | 326                       |
| Ballyhackett Primary School                     | 67                        |
| Ballyhenry Primary School                       | 317                       |
| Ballykeel Primary School                        | 406                       |
| Ballymena Primary School                        | 369                       |
| Ballymoney Controlled Integrated Primary School | 414                       |
| Ballynure Primary School                        | 154                       |
| Ballysally Primary School                       | 304                       |

| <b>School name</b>                             | <b>Approved Enrolment Number</b> |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Ballytober Primary School                      | 77                               |
| Balnamore Primary School                       | 111                              |
| Barnish Primary School                         | 115                              |
| Bellaghy Primary School                        | 115                              |
| Braidside Integrated Primary School            | 348                              |
| Broughshane Primary School                     | 319                              |
| Buick Memorial Primary School                  | 472                              |
| Bushmills Primary School                       | 226                              |
| Bushvalley Primary School                      | 174                              |
| Cairncastle Primary School                     | 137                              |
| Camphill Primary School                        | 385                              |
| Carhill Integrated Primary School              | 94                               |
| Carlane Primary School                         | 124                              |
| Carnaghts Primary School                       | 118                              |
| Carnalbanagh Primary School                    | 58                               |
| Carnalridge Primary School                     | 230                              |
| Carniny Primary School                         | 267                              |
| Carnlough Controlled Integrated Primary School | 62                               |
| Carnmoney Primary School                       | 448                              |
| Carrickfergus Central Primary                  | 290                              |
| Carrickfergus Model Primary School             | 406                              |
| Carrowreagh Primary School                     | 102                              |
| Castledawson Primary School                    | 145                              |
| Castleroe Primary School                       | 98                               |
| Clough Primary School                          | 151                              |
| Cloughmills Primary School                     | 143                              |
| Corran Integrated Primary School               | 203                              |
| Creavery Primary School                        | 65                               |
| Creggan Primary School                         | 118                              |
| Crossroads Primary School                      | 145                              |
| Crumlin Controlled Intergrated Primary School  | 374                              |
| Culcrow Primary School                         | 77                               |
| Cullycapple Primary School                     | 100                              |
| Culnady Primary School                         | 63                               |
| D H Christie Memorial Primary School           | 452                              |
| Dalriada School                                | n.a.                             |
| Damhead Primary School                         | 174                              |
| Desertmartin Primary School                    | 48                               |



| <b>School name</b>                      | <b>Approved Enrolment Number</b> |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Doagh Primary School                    | 138                              |
| Drumard Primary School                  | 116                              |
| Dunclug Primary School                  | 261                              |
| Duneane Primary School                  | 80                               |
| Dunseverick Primary School              | 166                              |
| Earlview Primary School                 | 221                              |
| Eden Primary School, Carrickfergus      | 213                              |
| Eden Primary School, Ballymoney         | 95                               |
| Fairview Primary School                 | 525                              |
| Fourtowns Primary School                | 262                              |
| Gaelscoil an Chaistil                   | 105                              |
| Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí                  | 33                               |
| Gaelscoil Eanna                         | 67                               |
| Gaelscoil Ghleann Darach                | 71                               |
| Gaelscoil na Spéiríní                   | 58                               |
| Garryduff Primary School                | 70                               |
| Garvagh Primary School                  | 236                              |
| Glenann Primary School                  | 61                               |
| Glengormley Integrated Primary School   | 446                              |
| Glenravel Primary School                | 162                              |
| Glynn Primary School                    | 103                              |
| Gorran Primary School                   | 120                              |
| Gracehill Primary School                | 406                              |
| Greenisland Primary School              | 401                              |
| Greenlough Primary School (St Mary's)   | 196                              |
| Greystone Primary School                | 394                              |
| Groggan Primary School                  | 137                              |
| Harpurs Hill Primary School             | 224                              |
| Harryville Primary School               | 277                              |
| Hazelbank Primary School                | 120                              |
| Hezlett Primary School                  | 295                              |
| Hollybank Primary School                | 440                              |
| Holy Family Primary School, Magherafelt | 622                              |
| Irish Society's Primary School          | 427                              |
| Kells & Connor Primary School           | 203                              |
| Kilbride Primary School                 | 135                              |
| Kilcoan Primary School                  | 87                               |
| Killowen Primary School, Coleraine      | 195                              |

| <b>School name</b>                             | <b>Approved Enrolment Number</b> |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Kilmoyle Primary School                        | 115                              |
| Kilrea Primary School                          | 127                              |
| Kilross Primary School                         | 112                              |
| King's Park Primary School, Newtownabbey       | 425                              |
| Kirkinriola Primary School                     | 104                              |
| Knockahollet Primary School                    | 106                              |
| Knockloughrim Primary School                   | 105                              |
| Knocknagin Primary School                      | 75                               |
| Landhead Primary School                        | 60                               |
| Larne and Inver Primary School                 | 237                              |
| Leaney Primary School                          | 319                              |
| Linn Primary School                            | 380                              |
| Lislagan Primary School                        | 109                              |
| Loanends Primary School                        | 203                              |
| Longstone Primary School                       | 73                               |
| Macosquin Primary School                       | 194                              |
| Maghera Primary School                         | 163                              |
| Magherafelt Controlled Primary School          | 406                              |
| Maine Integrated Primary School                | 120                              |
| Mallusk Primary School                         | 132                              |
| Millburn Primary School                        | 422                              |
| Millquarter Primary School                     | 145                              |
| Millstrand Integrated Primary School           | 232                              |
| Moneynick Primary School                       | 69                               |
| Moorfields Primary School                      | 220                              |
| Mossgrove Primary School                       | 330                              |
| Mossley Primary School                         | 610                              |
| Mount St Michael's Primary School, Randalstown | 444                              |
| Moyle Primary School                           | 290                              |
| Mullaghdubh Primary School                     | 78                               |
| New Row Primary School                         | 170                              |
| Oakfield Primary School                        | 369                              |
| Olderfleet Primary School                      | 198                              |
| Parkgate Primary School                        | 77                               |
| Parkhall Primary School                        | 443                              |
| Portglenone Primary School                     | 204                              |
| Portrush Primary School                        | 286                              |
| Portstewart Primary School                     | 412                              |

| <b>School name</b>                         | <b>Approved Enrolment Number</b> |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Randalstown Central Primary School         | 379                              |
| Rasharkin Primary School                   | 169                              |
| Rathcoole Primary School                   | 488                              |
| Rathenraw Integrated Primary School        | 223                              |
| Round Tower Integrated Primary School      | 276                              |
| Seaview Primary School, Glenarm            | 121                              |
| Silverstream Primary School                | 225                              |
| Spires Integrated Primary School           | 203                              |
| St Anne's Primary School, Corkey           | 92                               |
| St Anthony's Primary School, Larne         | 476                              |
| St Bernard's Primary School, Newtownabbey  | 493                              |
| St Brigid's Primary School, Ballymena      | 319                              |
| St Brigid's Primary School, Ballymoney     | 308                              |
| St Brigid's Primary School, Cloughmills    | 106                              |
| St Brigid's Primary School, Knockloughrim  | 195                              |
| St Brigid's Primary School, Tirkane        | 203                              |
| St Ciaran's Primary School, Cushendun      | 105                              |
| St Colmcille's Primary, Ballymena          | 319                              |
| St Columba's Primary School, Draperstown   | 132                              |
| St Columba's Primary School, Garvagh       | 144                              |
| St Columba's Primary School, Kilrea        | 202                              |
| St Columb's Primary School (Cullion)       | 113                              |
| St Colum's Primary School, Portstewart     | 187                              |
| St Comgall's Primary School, Antrim        | 536                              |
| St Eoghan's Primary School, Draperstown    | 127                              |
| St James' Primary School, Newtownabbey     | 387                              |
| St John Bosco Primary School, Ballynease   | 106                              |
| St John's Primary School, Carnlough        | 192                              |
| St John's Primary School, Coleraine        | 351                              |
| St John's Primary School, Swatragh         | 195                              |
| St Joseph's Primary School, Dunloy         | 300                              |
| St Joseph's Primary School, Stiles         | 762                              |
| St Macnisius' Primary School, Tannaghmore  | 108                              |
| St Macnissi's Primary School, Larne        | 261                              |
| St Macnissi's Primary School, Newtownabbey | 175                              |
| St Malachy's Primary School, Coleraine     | 323                              |
| St Mary's Primary School (Glenview)        | 446                              |
| St Mary's Primary School Glenravel         | 125                              |

| <b>School name</b>                                     | <b>Approved Enrolment Number</b> |
|--|----------------------------------|
| St Mary's Primary School, Ballycastle                  | 29                               |
| St Mary's Primary School, Bellaghy                     | 222                              |
| St Mary's Primary School, Cushendall                   | 213                              |
| St Mary's Primary School, Draperstown                  | 260                              |
| St Mary's Primary, Portglenone                         | 203                              |
| St Mary's-on-the-Hill Primary School, Newtownabbey     | 430                              |
| St Nicholas' Primary School, Carrickfergus             | 232                              |
| St Olcan's Primary School, Armoy                       | 97                               |
| St Oliver Plunkett's Primary School, Toomebridge       | 227                              |
| St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School, Ballycastle | 406                              |
| St Patrick's & St Joseph's Primary School, Garvagh     | 160                              |
| St Patrick's Primary School (Glen)                     | 175                              |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Loughguile                | 232                              |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Portrush                  | 150                              |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Rasharkin                 | 273                              |
| St Patrick's Primary School, Waterfoot                 | 130                              |
| St Paul's Primary School, Ahoghill                     | 81                               |
| St Trea's Primary School, Ballyronan                   | 107                              |
| Straid Primary School                                  | 119                              |
| Straidbilly Primary School                             | 105                              |
| Straidhavern Primary School                            | 125                              |
| Sunnylands Primary School                              | 290                              |
| Templepatrick Primary School                           | 406                              |
| The Diamond Primary School                             | 138                              |
| The Wm Pinkerton Memorial Primary School               | 160                              |
| Thompson Primary School                                | 194                              |
| Tildarg Primary School                                 | 80                               |
| Tir-na-Nog Primary School                              | 77                               |
| Tobermore Primary School                               | 130                              |
| Toreagh Primary School                                 | 105                              |
| Upper Ballyboley Primary School                        | 100                              |
| Victoria Primary School, Carrickfergus                 | 575                              |
| Whiteabbey Primary School                              | 414                              |
| Whitehead Primary School                               | 390                              |
| Whitehouse Primary School                              | 360                              |
| Woodburn Primary School                                | 193                              |
| Woodlawn Primary School                                | 310                              |

(ii)

**North Eastern Education and Library Board Post-Primary School Approved Enrolment Numbers**

| <b>School name</b>                          | <b>Approved Enrolment Number</b> |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Antrim Grammar School                       | 740                              |
| Ballee Community High School                | 525                              |
| Ballycastle High School                     | 460                              |
| Ballyclare High School                      | 1210                             |
| Ballyclare Secondary School                 | 960                              |
| Ballymena Academy                           | 1200                             |
| Ballymoney High School                      | 670                              |
| Belfast High School                         | 930                              |
| Cambridge House Grammar                     | 1030                             |
| Carrickfergus College                       | 900                              |
| Carrickfergus Grammar School                | 800                              |
| Coleraine Academical Institution            | 870                              |
| Coleraine College                           | 600                              |
| Coleraine High School                       | 800                              |
| Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle        | 720                              |
| Crumlin Integrated College                  | 400                              |
| Cullybackey High School                     | 700                              |
| Dalriada School                             | 815                              |
| Dominican College, Portstewart              | 480                              |
| Downshire School                            | 800                              |
| Dunclug College                             | 600                              |
| Dunluce School                              | 550                              |
| Edmund Rice College                         | 600                              |
| Garvagh High School                         | 350                              |
| Glengormley High School                     | 1250                             |
| Larne Grammar School                        | 735                              |
| Larne High School                           | 750                              |
| Loreto College, Coleraine                   | 800                              |
| Magherafelt High School                     | 600                              |
| Monkstown Community School                  | 820                              |
| Newtownabbey Community High School          | 650                              |
| North-Coast Integrated College              | 500                              |
| Our Lady of Lourdes High School, Ballymoney | 400                              |
| Parkhall Integrated College                 | 735                              |
| Rainey Endowed School                       | 700                              |
| Slemish College, Ballymena                  | 720                              |

| School name                           | Approved Enrolment Number |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Sperrin Integrated College            | 500                       |
| St Benedict's College, Randalstown    | 500                       |
| St Colm's High School, Magherafelt    | 340                       |
| St Joseph's College, Coleraine        | 490                       |
| St Killian's College, Carnlough       | 830                       |
| St Louis' Grammar School, Ballymena   | 960                       |
| St Mary's College, Portglenone        | 350                       |
| St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt | 1070                      |
| St Patrick's College, Ballymena       | 760                       |
| St Patrick's College, Maghera         | 1355                      |
| St Paul's College, Kilrea             | 270                       |
| St Pius X College, Magherafelt        | 850                       |
| Ulidia Integrated College             | 500                       |

**Source:** DE School Access Team.

**Note:-** maximum enrolment number is the same as approved enrolment number

### Portadown College: Cost of Refurbishment and Repairs

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Education how much was spent on refurbishment and repairs at Portadown College in the 2010/11 financial year.

**(AQW 10265/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The total amount spent on refurbishment and repairs at Portadown College during 2010/11 was £49,134.

### Post-primary Education: Children from the Republic of Ireland

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has any plans to allow children living in the Republic of Ireland to avail of post-primary education.

**(AQW 10267/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Pupils from the south can already apply for admission to a post-primary school in the north. Currently 402 young people who live in the south attend post-primary schools here and all applicants for the 2011/12 school year were accepted for places.

This is reflective of how people in the border areas live and avail of services, including education. My Department and the Department of Education and Skills are both planning for schools into the future and it is important to do so in a sustainable way that is able to meet parental preference in the border region. At the North South Ministerial Council education sectoral meeting in February 2012 it was agreed that the Departments will jointly conduct a survey in the autumn of potential cross border pupil movement to inform school planning.

### Portadown College: Cost of Refurbishment and Repairs

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Education how much was spent on refurbishment and repairs at Portadown College in the 2011/12 financial year.

**(AQW 10278/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** The total amount spent on refurbishment and repairs at Portadown College during 2011/12 was £ 400,216.

### Sure Start: Bangor

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education (i) what plans he has to extend the Sure Start provision in Bangor to include the Dufferin and Whitehill electoral wards; (ii) when this will take place; and (ii) how much funding has been set aside to deliver the provision in these areas.

**(AQW 10314/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Under the draft Early Years Strategy there is an intention to extend Sure Start provision on a gradual basis over time, and as budgets allow, to the top 25% most disadvantaged wards. As the Dufferin and Whitehill wards fall within the top

25%, work is being progressed through the Eastern Childcare Partnership to scope existing provision and develop proposals for Sure Start services, based on an analysis of local needs through engagement and consultation with local representatives, organisations and parents. The proposal for the introduction of Sure Start to these areas will be considered by the Department in light of the available resources at that time.

### **Sure Start: Bangor**

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education, given that Sure Start provision is delivered to the Harbour and Rathgill areas of Bangor, why this information is not on the Eastern Childcare Partnership website to promote access to the service and to demonstrate his Department's investment in the areas.

**(AQW 10315/11-15)**

**Mr O'Dowd:** Sure Start services were introduced to the Harbour and Rathgill areas of Bangor during 2010/2011, through an expansion of the reach of Sure Start to the top 20% Super Output areas.

The Eastern Childcare Partnership (ECP) website provides information about childcare and family support services in the areas it serves, including an overview of Sure Start Projects. I am advised that the current website is in a period of transition as a new regional website for Sure Start is under development. Therefore the areas of Harbour and Rathgill are not included in the website in its current form.

## Department for Employment and Learning

### **Stranmillis University College: Ministerial Meeting**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 7953/11-15, (i) why he did not attend the meeting with staff from Stranmillis University College on 19 January 2012; (ii) who initiated the cancellation and when; and (iii) when he intends to meet with the staff.

**(AQW 9193/11-15)**

**Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):** The meeting was cancelled as the format was considered inappropriate. As I have stated previously, I remain open to meeting with all stakeholders.

### **Steps to Work: Participation**

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he will seek to widen participation in the Steps to Work programme by reducing the compulsory hours for people on Job Seekers Allowance from 30 hours per week in order to help employers give people who are currently out of work the necessary experience to gain employment.

**(AQW 9806/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** It is important that participants on the Steps to Work programme get the opportunity to undertake a meaningful level of participation to provide them with a realistic and relevant workplace experience.

The current attendance requirement of 30 hours per week gives participants exposure to the normal weekday and weekly routine of the organisation or employer with whom they are placed and enables participants to acquire the employability skills sought by prospective employers.

As Steps to Work contracts end in March 2013 the Department is currently considering what will be delivered in the future. Attendance requirements will be considered as part of the development work for the new programme.

### **Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College: Proposed Merger**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 7182/11-15, whether he will take cognisance of the unions which are opposed to the proposed merger, such as Stranmillis University College UCU Branch.

**(AQW 9858/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** I have taken cognisance of all responses to the public consultation.

### **Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College: Proposed Merger**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 9075/11-15, how many people will be involved in carrying out the study; and from where the £50,000 budget will be obtained.

**(AQW 9921/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The first stage of the study is being procured through the Central Procurement Directorate of the Department of Finance and Personnel. It is likely that the work will be awarded to a company and at this stage one cannot predict the size of the team that may be tasked with undertaking the work. The budget will come from the normal administrative resources made available to my department.

## Theatre Courses: University Provision

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why technical theatre courses, such as set design and lighting, are not provided by universities.

**(AQW 9933/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** Higher Education Institutions are responsible for their own policies and procedures, including course provision. Queen's University and the University of Ulster have, however, stated that, while they do not offer stand-alone Technical Theatre courses, a number of degree courses include modules teaching technical theatre skills.

Details of this are included in the information provided by the Universities and attached at Annex A.

### Annex A

#### University of Ulster

School of Media, Film and Journalism

The University of Ulster has traditionally not offered bespoke programmes in set design or lighting. Historically, the University has produced graduates from its School of Art and Design in design, fine art and applied arts that have applied their creative skills and are currently working within film set and theatre set design. A number of these graduates have been working in this area for over 25 years.

Having a modest theatre provision and a traditionally small film production operation in Northern Ireland there has not been a local industry set-up large enough to employ the throughput of specialist graduates required to make a bespoke set and lighting design programme viable in its own right.

The Media Studies and Production programme in Coleraine covers a limited aspect of set lighting for television studio. However, the current provision in architecture, interior design, product design, fine art, fashion/textiles, and applied arts make the University well placed to produce graduates suited to work within technical theatre/film.

One Master of Architecture student is currently designing a theatre on the Crumlin Road jail site and in the past some interior design students have elected to produce theatre set designs as part of their final-year portfolio submission. However, international productions generally bring together partners from across the globe and often film directors/producers will have their own preferences for set designers/lighting designers – who they will source worldwide.

The University is acutely aware of the huge benefits of the developing film and production facilities in Northern Ireland and have set up a new BAHons Interaction Design and Animation for the purposes of training for post-production. The first cohort of undergraduates will commence in autumn 2012. This programme is led by internationally renowned animator and Professor of Animation, Greg Maguire. A number of students studying at masters level under his tutelage (MA Multidisciplinary Design [Animation]) are producing work for high profile film productions internationally.

If the need arises, and there are sufficient cross-linkages with partnership organisations that can facilitate the access to specialist facilities (the MAC/Lyric/Opera House/Playhouse etc.) then a postgraduate offering in this area may be considered. This would of course require the recruitment of further specialist staff and the added resource required to ensure a course of appropriate quality could be delivered in Northern Ireland.

School of Creative Arts

The University of Ulster teaches set design and lighting on the BA Drama on the University's Magee campus. The two first-year core modules DRA111 Issues in Performance 2: The Theatrical Space and DRA110: Performance Technologies are the most relevant modules in year 1 for introducing Drama students to fundamental skills and concepts in scenography and technical theatre production respectively, and DRA309: Production Process in year 2 requires Major and Single Honours students to research, develop and apply skills across the whole range of production roles appropriate to professional theatre production. A number of graduates from the Drama programme are now working professionally in technical theatre roles.

Queen's University Belfast

Queen's University offers a module in 'Stage Management and Theatre Production' (DRA2056) which runs across two semesters of the undergraduate degree in Drama Studies. The main thrust of the modules is to equip students with a basic grounding in all aspects of technical theatre.

Similar modules are offered at all levels of the Film Studies undergraduate degree programme – with the focus on technical issues, including lighting and film craft. As part of the Music Technology degree programme, modules are offered which provide training in location sound, theatre sound, and recording and editing.

## Away-days and Team-building Exercises: Cost-effectiveness

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department assesses the cost-effectiveness of away-days and team-building exercises.

**(AQW 9949/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The Department has a policy on organisational development (away-days) and team building exercises, and issues guidance to all staff. The policy and guidance include information on how all events must be evaluated against output-based



objectives. This evaluation exercise is led by management in business areas. Events are only approved where appropriate objectives are set in advance and financial resources are available. The policy and guidance are regularly reviewed, updated and circulated to staff.

### Papers for Assembly Committees

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail all occasions in the last 12 months when his Department has made a presentation to an Assembly committee and provided papers pertaining to that presentation to the committee less than 48 hours beforehand.

**(AQW 9977/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** During the period 1 March 2011 to 29 February 2012 there were eight occasions when officials from the Department for Employment and Learning made a presentation to the Assembly committee and papers were provided less than 48 hours before the meeting. The attached table lists the meeting dates, topics and dates of issue. An asterisk marks each of the eight occasions.

#### Annex

| Date of meeting   | Topic   | Dates papers issued  |
|-------------------|---|--|
| 23 March 2011     | European issues   | 18 March 2011  |
| 1 June 2011       | June monitoring<br>Temporary Agency Workers   | 31 May 2011*<br>23 May 2011  |
| 8 June 2011       | Higher Education Strategy   | 2 June 2011  |
| 15 June 2011      | European issues<br>Further information on Temporary Agency Workers                          | 9 June 2011<br>10 June 2011  |
| 22 June 2011      | Stranmillis College and Queen's University Belfast<br>June monitoring                       | 17 June 2011<br>21 June 2011*  |
| 29 June 2011      | Student finance   | 23 June 2011   |
| 14 September 2011 | Legislative Consent Motion – Ofqual<br>Consultation on tutor qualifications                 | 2 August 2011 and 8 September 2011<br>4 August 2011                      |
| 21 September 2011 | Review of Education Maintenance Allowance<br>Welfare Reform<br>Incapacity Benefit migration | Report provided 13 January 2011<br>16 September 2011<br>9 September 2011 |
| 5 October 2011    | October Monitoring  | 30 September 2011 4 October 2011   |
| 12 October 2011   | Re-contracting Training for Success   | 6 October 2011   |
| 19 October 2011   | Disability Employment Service<br>Budget briefing  | 6 October 2011<br>14 October 2011  |
| 9 November 2011   | Essential Skills<br>October Monitoring  | 3 November 2011<br>3 November 2011                                       |
| 23 November 2011  | Employment Rights   | 21 November 2011*  |
| 30 November 2011  | Careers Strategy<br>December monitoring   | 29 November 2011*<br>29 November 2011*                                   |
| 14 December 2011  | December Monitoring<br>Young People not in Education, Employment or Training                | 14 December 2011*<br>8 December 2011                                     |
| 11 January 2012   | Employment Service<br>PfG, ISNI and Economic Strategy                                       | 4 January 2012<br>Papers issued centrally                                |

| Date of meeting  | Topic  | Dates papers issued                   |
|------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 18 January 2012  | Training for Success   | 17 January 2012*                      |
| 8 February 2012  | Learner Access and Engagement<br>Further Education Division                                    | 24 January 2012<br>12 January 2012    |
| 29 February 2012 | Strategy, European and Employment<br>Relations Division<br>Blacklisting of trade union members | 27 February 2012*<br>22 February 2012 |

\* provided less than 48 hours before the meeting.

### Training for Success: Contract Providers

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions his Department has had with Training for Success contract providers in relation to the continuation of their contracts post March 2012.

**(AQW 9988/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** To ensure that training provision under Training for Success and Apprenticeships NI continues to be in place, my Department has written to all existing training suppliers offering an extension to their current contract for a short period after 31 March 2012.

In terms of the new training provision my Department, via the Central Procurement Directorate, issued Intention to Award letters to all successful tenderers on 2 April 2012. It is my Department's intention to have the new provision in place as soon as possible, in line with the principles and procedures of public procurement.

### Further Education Facilities: Safeguarding Procedures

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has ordered a review of the relevant procedures in further education facilities to avoid a recurrence of the issues surrounding Stuart Townsend's attendance at Belfast Metropolitan College and the allegations made at the North West College.

**(AQW 10022/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** My officials have requested a sector-wide policy, in respect of safeguarding at the six further education colleges. This will ensure that coherent, joined-up procedures are in place, to avoid any recurrence of this situation.

### Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College: Proposed Merger

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he will seek clarification from the Chair of the Board of Governors of Stranmillis University College on his statement that the college was "in a dire situation, on a life support machine" and whether he was referring to the College's long-term future or the proposed merger with Queen's University, Belfast.

**(AQW 10023/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** I will not be seeking any clarification on the statements made in November 2011 by the Chair of the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College.

### Training for Success: Independent Assessors

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning who were the independent assessors for his Department's application to the European Social Fund Programme for the Training for Success initiative; and how they were appointed.

**(AQW 10031/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The independent assessors appointed to undertake the selection process for Priority 1 of the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NIESF) Programme, 2007-2013 (the Government Managed Programme Application for the Training for Success Programme administered by my Department's Training Programmes Branch) were FPM Consultants. They were appointed by single Tender.

### Training for Success: European Social Fund Allocation

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much of the European Social Fund allocation has been spent to date on the Training for Success initiative; and how much is indicated on the spend database.

**(AQW 10032/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The Northern Ireland ESF Managing Authority has a letter of Offer with Training Programmes Branch, worth £8.67m, for the Programme Led Apprentices project. This amount, once vouched, verified and claimed in keeping with EU regulations will be recorded on the spend database in due course and no slippage is currently expected.

### Training for Success: Letters of Offer

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to his Department's Training for Success initiative and the European Social Fund, whether there is an opportunity to amend the letter of offer allocation to the Training for Success initiative should slippage be identified; and whether other projects are eligible to bid should slippage occur.

**(AQW 10033/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The regulations applying to the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme (NIESF), 2007 -2013 allow for the amendment of all Letters of Offer, including the offer to the Training for Success Programme. It is not anticipated that slippage will occur in expenditure committed to the Training for Success Programme and there are no plans to hold further competitions for funding over the remaining duration of the NIESF Programme 2007-2013.

### Freedom of Information Act: Review

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail his Department's position in relation to the submission made by the Civil Service to the Westminster Justice Committee's review of the Freedom of Information Act.

**(AQW 10040/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** My Department provided input to the NICS submission underlining that, where the Freedom of Information Act is used appropriately, it serves a useful purpose. The Department for Employment and Learning's input raised a number of points, however, where it felt that the operation of the Act could be improved. These included: a suggestion that fees provisions be amended to include time spent analysing information before release, and to allow the aggregation of costs to individual departments in responding to 'round robin requests'. In addition, my Department's response proposed that the definition and criteria around both the issue of vexatious requests and the application of the section 35 exemption be reviewed.

I continue to support Freedom of Information and believe that when used properly it is an important tool in achieving accountability and transparency in government.

### North West Regional College: Enrolments

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the enrolment figures for the North West Regional College for the (i) 2007/08; (ii) 2008/09; (iii) 2009/10; and (iv) 2010/11 academic years, broken down by (a) curriculum area; and (b) school.

**(AQW 10068/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The number of professional and technical enrolments at the North West Regional College by Subject Area from 2007/08 to 2010/11 is detailed in Annex A. The Department does not hold enrolment data by school within Further Education Colleges, and so I am not in a position to provide this information.

#### Annex A

##### Professional and Technical Enrolments in North West Regional College By Subject Area (2007/08 - 2010/11)

| Subject Area                                   | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Health, Public Services & Care                 | 2,035   | 2,004   | 2,743   | 3,265   |
| Science & Mathematics                          | 793     | 892     | 1,047   | 997     |
| Agriculture, Horticulture & Animal Care        | 72      | 48      | 94      | 301     |
| Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies       | 1,283   | 1,416   | 1,272   | 1,246   |
| Construction, Planning & the Built Environment | 1,595   | 1,193   | 1,117   | 1,080   |
| Information & Communication Technology         | 2,081   | 1,988   | 1,694   | 2,011   |
| Retail & Commercial Enterprise                 | 2,149   | 2,223   | 2,428   | 2,541   |
| Leisure, Travel & Tourism                      | 523     | 512     | 621     | 832     |
| Arts, Media & Publishing                       | 950     | 1,184   | 1,350   | 1,336   |
| Social Sciences                                | 84      | 100     | 93      | 97      |
| Languages, Literature & Culture                | 1,211   | 743     | 867     | 598     |
| Education & Training                           | 2,770   | 3,419   | 5,302   | 5,109   |
| Preparation for Life & Work                    | 361     | 94      | 160     | 242     |
| Business, Administration & Law                 | 1,085   | 1,332   | 1,453   | 1,296   |

| Subject Area | 2007/08       | 2008/09       | 2009/10       | 2010/11       |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Total</b> | <b>16,992</b> | <b>17,148</b> | <b>20,241</b> | <b>20,951</b> |

**Source:** Further Education Statistical Record (FESR)

**Notes:**

- 1 Latest validated data held by my Department pertains to the 2010/11 academic year.
- 2 Professional and technical provision relates to those courses which have a qualification aim attached.
- 3 Recreational provision is not included in the above table.
- 4 It is important to note that whilst ICT Essential Skills provision was included in the answer to AQW 10069/11-15 (which requested information on ICT enrolments by Levels 0, 1 and 2) that Essential Skills ICT provision in the above table is included under the Subject Area 'Education and Training'.

### North West Regional College: ICT Enrolments

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the enrolment figures in ICT/Computing Levels (i) 0; (ii) 1; and (iii) 2 in the North West Regional College for the (a) 2007/08; (b) 2008/09; (c) 2009/10; and (d) 2010/11 academic years. **(AQW 10069/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The number of ICT professional and technical enrolments for levels 0, 1 and 2 under the Subject Area ICT as well as those for ICT in Essential Skills at the North West Regional College from 2007/08 to 2010/11 is detailed in Annex A.

**Annex A**

**ICT Professional and Technical Enrolments (for Levels 0,1 and 2) in North West Regional College 2007/08-2010/11**

| Level                                  | 2007/08      | 2008/09      | 2009/10      | 2010/11      |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>ICT Subject Area enrolments</b>     |              |              |              |              |
| 0                                      | 436          | 804          | 566          | 1,176        |
| 1                                      | 984          | 424          | 566          | 209          |
| 2                                      | 226          | 332          | 278          | 244          |
| ICT Subject Area Total                 | 1,646        | 1,560        | 1,410        | 1,629        |
| <b>ICT Essential Skills Enrolments</b> |              |              |              |              |
| ICT Essential Skills Total             | 0            | 169          | 1,478        | 1,291        |
| <b>Overall Total</b>                   | <b>1,646</b> | <b>1,729</b> | <b>2,888</b> | <b>2,920</b> |

**Source:** Further Education Statistical Record (FESR)

**Notes:**

- 1 Latest validated data held by my Department pertains to the 2010/11 academic year.
- 2 For the purpose of this AQW, over and above enrolments in the Subject Area ICT, the answer also sets out enrolments in ICT Essential Skills which is classified under the Subject Area Education and Training. It is important to note that in respect of AQW 10068/11-15 ICT Essential Skills provision has been included under the Subject Area Education and Training.
- 3 Professional and technical provision relates to those courses which have a qualification aim attached.
- 4 Recreational provision is not included in the above table.

### European Social Fund: Eligibility

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether applications to the European Social Fund Programme were open only to agencies associated with his Department. **(AQW 10080/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** No. Applications to the European Social Fund were open to all organisations who met the regulatory requirements of the Northern Ireland ESF Operational Programme Document.

### **European Social Fund: Nil Spend Projects**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning which projects, awarded funding under the European Social Fund Programme, currently have a nil spend on the EU spend database; and how this will impact on the departmental N+2 target and expenditure figures.

**(AQW 10098/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** A total of three projects offered funding under the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme, 2007-2013 have not yet submitted claims and have not yet recorded spend on the European Programmes database system. All three projects have commenced and incurred expenditure that will be claimed from the programme and reimbursed, subject to vouching and verification of regulatory eligibility. The projects are anticipated to spend during the current year and to contribute to the achievement of the N+2 expenditure target for 2012.

### **European Social Fund: N+2 Expenditure Targets**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what remedial action plan his Department has in place to meet the N+2 targets in cases where an underspend is anticipated.

**(AQW 10099/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The Department has achieved all N+2 expenditure targets since the commencement of the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme, 2007-2013 and is satisfied that sufficient funding has been committed to meet future N+2 targets.

### **European Social Fund: Match Funding**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether any of his Department's match funding for the European Social Fund Programme has been surrendered to the Executive.

**(AQW 10100/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** In 2008/09 and 2009/10 £813k and £300k respectively of the Department's 25% contribution to the Northern Ireland Social Fund (NIESF) was surrendered to DFP as part of the monitoring round process. No ESF funding was lost as a result of these easements.

### **European Social Fund: Recommitted Funding**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether any of the funding allocated from the European Social Fund Programme has been recommitted and surrendered to the EU.

**(AQW 10106/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** None of the funding €165.7 million allocated to the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme, 2007-2013 has been recommitted or returned to the European Commission.

### **CPR: Staff Training**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what strategy is in place to train departmental staff in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

**(AQW 10161/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The Department is committed to maintaining a safe and healthy working environment and has published a Strategy for Workplace Health and Safety (2011- 2014). In line with Health & Safety regulations the Department actively trains designated first aiders in the skills they need to carry out this role. First Aid training includes current instruction in administering Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

### **St Mary's University College: Proposed Merger**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 9638/11-15, (i) whether St Mary's University College, Belfast, is part of the proposed merger; (ii) whether a public consultation on its inclusion has been completed or will be completed; and (iii) how many of its staff or members of the Board of Governors have been detailed with pursuing a proposed merger.

**(AQW 10232/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** As outlined during my statement in the Assembly, the proposals put forward by Stranmillis University College did not include merger with St Mary's University College Belfast. The second stage of the study of the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland will examine the options for a more shared and integrated system for the delivery and funding of teacher education.

### **European Social Fund: Procedures**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the (i) departmental procedures; and (ii) EU guidance in relation to the distribution of allocated funds from the European Social Fund when projects do not accept the funding or withdraw from the European Social Fund Programme.

**(AQW 10250/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The procedures for the application, distribution and allocation of funding under the NIESF Programme were agreed by the ESF Monitoring Committee, EU Commission and the NI Executive and are set out in the Operational Manual. The distribution and allocation of ESF funding is subject to ongoing review by the Managing Authority to take account of spending across the current 82 projects in the second call and to ensure that we meet our N+2 targets.

### **European Social Fund: Surrendered Moneys**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the total level of funding allocated but not accepted in the second round of the European Social Fund Programme.

**(AQW 10251/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** A total of £1,270,337 ESF and DEL funding was allocated under the second call of the NIESF Programme to 2 organisations that subsequently withdrew from the Programme.

### **European Social Fund: Successful Projects**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to the second round of the European Social Fund Programme, (i) how many projects were scored as successful by the assessment team, but were not allocated funding due to oversubscription; and (ii) the total value of the unallocated funding for the successful but unfunded projects.

**(AQW 10252/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** In the second round of the European Social Fund Programme a total of 17 projects were scored as successful but not allocated funding, the total eligible value of the ESF and DEL funding sought was £ 9,744,700.

### **European Social Fund: Allocation Mechanism**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what mechanism was used to allocate the funds identified in his Department's value for money exercise on the European Social Fund Programme.

**(AQW 10300/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** The Department carried out an affordability exercise on the second call for funding under the Northern Ireland European Social Fund. In addition all 83 projects, selected for reduced funding of 75% had to achieve a satisfactory economic appraisal rating determined against DFP standards.

The second call was significantly over-subscribed in terms of both the number of applications received and the funding sought. A total of 112 applications were received under the second call compared with 86 for the first call, an increase of over 30%.

The total value of ESF funding sought amounted to almost £50 million, against an ESF budget of £30 million over a three-year period. The Department applied a cut – off point of 134 marks to ensure that available funds were distributed to as many projects as possible i.e. fund the greatest number of projects, but at a reduced level that would still be feasible for the projects.

This arrangement resulted in a much greater number of projects funded than would have been the case. Had all top scoring projects been allocated the full amount bid for, only 49 projects would have been supported in the second call.

### **European Social Fund: Value for Money**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department's instruction, that projects successful in the European Social Fund Programme required a 25 percent value for money reduction in costs, was implemented across all the projects; and if not, what are the reasons for any inconsistency.

**(AQW 10301/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** I can confirm that all successful projects in the second call of the NIESF Programme were required to make a 25% reduction to their costs without exception.

### **Step Ahead Initiative**

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he plans to recommence the Step Ahead initiative before the dissolution of his Department.

**(AQW 10308/11-15)**

**Dr Farry:** I am considering making a bid in the June monitoring round for additional resources. If successful this will allow me to introduce a targeted Step Ahead initiative.

## Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

### Public Procurement in Northern Ireland: Inquiry Report

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to paragraph 258 of the Report on the Inquiry into Public Procurement in Northern Ireland about her Department's lead responsibility in terms of the small business and social economy sectors, what guidance is available to a panel assessing a tender if it is unsure about any element of an application or the applicant's ability to meet the criteria.

**(AQW 8793/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):** The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) has published two guidance notes in relation to the selection and assessment of tenders. They are "The Selection and Pre-qualification of Contractors" (Procurement Guidance Note 04/10) and "The Procedures and Principles for the Evaluation of Tenders" (Procurement Guidance Note 02/09).

The guidance sets out a clearly defined process which must be followed by evaluation panels to ensure consistency of approach, transparency and equality of treatment. Tender evaluation panels are required to assess each tender on the basis of the information supplied.

In line with the guidance the Chair of the assessment panel may seek clarification via the Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) in relation to any element of the application on behalf of panel members, if required. In so doing CoPEs ensure that other applicants are not placed at a disadvantage.

### Energy Efficiency: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support her Department provides to small and medium-sized enterprises that wish to make their properties more energy efficient.

**(AQW 9688/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI supports Northern Ireland businesses (including SMEs) to improve their competitiveness, productivity and sustainability by delivering a range of measures to identify and achieve cost savings in the consumption of water, energy and raw materials. The degree of support will depend on the savings that are likely to be achieved in any particular business.

As well as advice and information delivered through Invest NI's website – [www.investni.com](http://www.investni.com) and through [www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk](http://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk) Invest NI can provide tailored support to appropriate businesses to assess energy, water and materials use with a view to identifying and prioritising projects that will reduce the cost of resource consumption.

Further technical expertise and support can also be offered to help individual business take forward projects and realise cost savings.

Specifically in relation to energy saving projects Invest NI also provides the funding for interest free, energy efficiency loans for businesses which are delivered by the Carbon Trust. This funding option offers unsecured business loans from £3k to £400k over four years to help Northern Ireland businesses install energy saving equipment. The size of loans depends on the energy saving potential of any particular project.

### Business Start-ups

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 9229/11-15, to give a breakdown by constituency of the 5,321 businesses started and the circa 4,257 of these which survived for more than 12 months.

**(AQW 9700/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI does hold the data necessary to determine the exact location of those new business starts which continued to trade after one year.

In order to provide an approximate estimate of the total number of new business starts that survive beyond the first year, a formula is applied. This formula was developed by KPMG during a previous evaluation of the Enterprise Development Programme (formerly the Start a Business Programme) and is considered to be appropriate.

The formula is based on the number of approvals that were estimated to proceed to starting a business (68%) and the number that were then estimated to survive for more than 1 year (80%).

### Tourism: Greyhound Industry

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what financial assistance is available to the greyhound industry to promote its development in relation to tourism and job creation.

**(AQW 9770/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Northern Ireland Tourist Board offers financial assistance to tourism and events projects through the Tourism Development Scheme and the Tourism Events Fund.

Applications are invited from those who require assistance and who meet the criteria of the application process.

The criteria for each call for applications is aligned to identified tourism priorities, currently based on the draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020.

No application for funding was received from the Greyhound Industry for either of these funding streams.

There is no current funding to the greyhound industry from DETI or its other Non Departmental Public Bodies.

### Tourist Board: Capital Investment

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of capital investment by the Tourist Board in each council area in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9785/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The total amount of financial assistance paid to tourism related businesses by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in each of the last five financial years is broken down in the table attached at Annex A.

#### Annex A

##### Breakdown of capital investment for District Council areas by financial year.

| District Council Area | 2006/07            | 2007/08              | 2008/09              | 2009/10               | 2010/11               | Total                 |
|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Antrim                |                    |                      | £5,000.00            | £58,382.50            | £145,000.00           | £208,382.50           |
| Ards                  |                    |                      | £214,284.00          | £53,428.00            | £120,655.27           | £388,367.27           |
| Armagh                |                    |                      | £1,029.00            | £375,926.50           | £356,506.12           | £733,461.62           |
| Ballymena             |                    |                      | £2,800.00            |                       | £5,875.00             | £8,675.00             |
| Ballymoney            |                    |                      |                      |                       |                       | £0.00                 |
| Banbridge             |                    |                      |                      |                       |                       | £0.00                 |
| Belfast               |                    | £612,085.00          |                      | £39,703,021.00        | £89,000.00            | £40,404,106.00        |
| Carrickfergus         |                    |                      | £126,055.00          |                       | £2,875.00             | £128,930.00           |
| Castlereagh           |                    |                      |                      |                       |                       | £0.00                 |
| Coleraine             | £110,000.00        | £68,650.00           | £5,000.00            | £497,655.00           | £168,814.25           | £850,119.25           |
| Cookstown             |                    |                      |                      | £27,000.00            | £500,000.00           | £527,000.00           |
| Craigavon             |                    |                      |                      | £263,697.00           |                       | £263,697.00           |
| Londonderry           |                    | £778,225.45          | £3,467,006.00        | £333,087.00           | £812,500.00           | £5,390,818.45         |
| Down                  |                    | £275,769.00          | £6,750.00            | £4,763.00             | £1,812,845.58         | £2,100,127.58         |
| Dungannon             |                    |                      |                      |                       | £132,971.00           | £132,971.00           |
| Fermanagh             | £194,997.00        | £50,000.00           |                      | £217,145.00           |                       | £462,142.00           |
| Larne                 |                    | £204,500.00          |                      | £29,918.00            | £132,777.09           | £367,195.09           |
| Limavady              |                    | £64,534.75           |                      |                       | £7,202.75             | £71,737.50            |
| Lisburn               |                    | £29,072.00           |                      |                       |                       | £29,072.00            |
| Magherafelt           |                    |                      |                      |                       | £35,753.00            | £35,753.00            |
| Moyle                 |                    | £76,752.00           | £142,005.00          | £283,772.38           | £9,487,532.29         | £9,990,061.67         |
| Newry and Mourne      |                    |                      | £8,750.00            | £363,330.25           | £494,083.10           | £866,163.35           |
| Newtownabbey          |                    |                      |                      | £669,359.00           |                       | £669,359.00           |
| North Down            |                    |                      |                      | £4,970.00             | £37,521.30            | £42,491.30            |
| Omagh                 |                    | £260,000.00          |                      | £150,000.00           | £32,500.00            | £442,500.00           |
| Strabane              |                    |                      |                      |                       |                       | £0.00                 |
| Cross                 |                    | £443,269.80          |                      | £199,769.00           | £32,800.00            | £675,838.80           |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>£304,997.00</b> | <b>£2,862,858.00</b> | <b>£3,978,679.00</b> | <b>£43,235,223.63</b> | <b>£14,407,211.75</b> | <b>£64,788,969.38</b> |

### Invest NI: Advertising Spend

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how much InvestNI has spent on advertising in each month of the current financial year; (ii) how much of this spend was planned; and (iii) how much was spent to use up the budget.  
**(AQW 9786/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:**

(i) How much Invest NI has spent on advertising in each month of the current financial year.

In the current financial year, Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI) has been responsible for delivering 11 separate advertising campaigns, covering a broad range of activities to support delivery of corporate targets and ensure that individuals and businesses are aware of relevant support available from Invest NI.



Monthly advertising expenditure for these campaigns, inclusive of VAT, media rebate and advertising levies, is as follows:

**FY 2011-12 Q1 and Q2**

| Campaign Title                | Apr-11 | May-11 | Jun-11 | Jul-11  | Aug-11  | Sept-11 |
|-------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| Boosting Business             | -      | -      | -      | -       | -       | -       |
| Go for It                     | -      | -      | -      | £18,954 | £91,945 | £62,473 |
| nibusinessinfo.co.uk          | £5,504 | £5,988 | £7,133 | £4,697  | £5,040  | £6,938  |
| Bring It On                   | -      | -      | -      | -       | -       | -       |
| R&D Calls for Application     | -      | -      | -      | -       | -       | -       |
| Innovation Vouchers           | -      | -      | £3,029 | -       | -       | £11,074 |
| Collaborative Networks        | -      | -      | -      | -       | -       | -       |
| Corporate Positioning         | £2,679 | £2,679 | £2,679 | £2,679  | £2,679  | £2,679  |
| Regional Advertorials         | -      | -      | -      | -       | -       | -       |
| Continental & United Airlines | -      | -      | -      | -       | -       | -       |
| International 2012 Promotion  | -      | -      | -      | -       | -       | -       |

**FY 2011-12 Q3 and Q4**

| Campaign Title                | Oct-11  | Nov-11  | Dec-11  | Jan-12   | Feb-12   | Mar-12   |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|----------|----------|
| Boosting Business             | £146    | £67,117 | £40,857 | £101,087 | £51,473  | £116,117 |
| Go for It                     | £18,154 | £33,344 | £22,812 | £50,658  | £40,531  | £0       |
| nibusinessinfo.co.uk          | £15,525 | £11,164 | £5,994  | £30,599  | £47,078  | £63,209  |
| Bring It On                   | -       | -       | -       | -        | £46,431  | £33,879  |
| R&D Calls for Application     | -       | -       | £15,019 | £9,553   | £15,463  | £12,278  |
| Innovation Vouchers           | -       | £3,006  | -       | -        | £16,619  | -        |
| Collaborative Networks        | -       | -       | £1,413  | £2,826   | £1,413   | -        |
| Corporate Positioning         | £2,679  | £2,679  | £2,679  | £2,679   | £2,679   | £2,679   |
| Regional Advertorials         | -       | £16,555 | £16,555 | £20,336  | £20,336  | £20,336  |
| Continental & United Airlines | -       | -       | -       | -        | £300,000 | -        |
| International 2012 Promotion  | -       | -       | -       | £470,742 | £28,390  | £287,538 |

(ii) How much of this spend was planned.

All advertising expenditure associated with Invest NI campaigns is planned and aligned to Corporate Plan priorities and annual Operating Plan targets.

(iii) How much was spent to use up the budget.

All advertising expenditure associated with Invest NI campaign is covered by the organisation's annual, existing baseline budget. None of Invest NI's advertising expenditure was spent to use up its annual budget.

## Tourism: Hurling

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration she has given to making hurling part of the north coast's tourism product, involving clubs such as Loughgiel Shamrocks.

**(AQW 9799/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** My department through the work of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has already identified hurling as an integral part of the tourism product in the north coast area. NITB has encouraged the development of Scullion Hurls as a visitor attraction and supported their aspiration to become part of the prestigious Économusée network which celebrates and promotes the work of artisan workers across Canada and Northern Europe. Phase 1 of the development is due to open in July 2012.

If Loughgiel Shamrocks wish to engage in tourism there are plenty of opportunities for them to do so. They need to engage at a local level and get involved in the destination planning for the Causeway Coast and Glens region through their local council, Ballymoney Borough Council.

## Business Improvement Districts: Proposals

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the opportunities that would be afforded to local businesses as a result of the introduction of Business Improvement Districts; and what discussions her officials have had with the Department for Social Development with a view to progressing its proposals.

**(AQW 9832/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Vibrant town and city centres create the incentive for the further development of tourism by offering more opportunities for visitors to spend in shops, restaurants, pubs and other attractions. In turn, this will support business growth.

I welcome the establishment of Business Improvement Districts with their potential to help Northern Ireland's high streets to reposition themselves to provide attractive vibrant environments which add value to the overall consumer experience.

DSD officials are keeping me informed as the primary legislation is taken forward and will be seeking their input as the secondary legislation and guidance are developed. I am keen to support DSD to ensure the potential of this important enabling legislation is realised..

## Titanic Festival

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail, for each of the last five years, (i) the funding that has been allocated by the Tourist Board to promote the Titanic Building and festival; and (ii) the funding that has been provided to each organisation to carry adverts highlighting the Titanic Building and festival.

**(AQW 9844/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** NI 2012 is a major opportunity to leverage from a series of significant events, including the Titanic Festival, and anniversaries to create a platform which will reposition Northern Ireland as a positive place to live, work, invest, study and visit.

The campaign supporting the ni2012 programme has been developed to maximise investment efficiencies and impact effectiveness across TV, Radio, Outdoor, Print, and Digital advertising. As a key focal point for the Titanic Festival, the Titanic Belfast building is one of a number of visual references being used in the current campaign. To date the NITB has allocated £402,508 to promote the Titanic Festival in both the Northern Ireland and Republic Of Ireland marketplaces.

Regarding the previous five years, the NITB has not developed campaigns featuring or promoting the Titanic Belfast building and has not provided funding for external organisations to develop advertising for the Titanic Building or Festival.

## Energy Costs

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 9158/11-15, what action her Department is taking to assist new companies in their decision to invest in Northern Ireland, and to ensure that high energy costs do not become a negative factor in their decision to do so.

**(AQW 9957/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Invest NI has a successful record in attracting high quality inward investment with a proposition that is based on a number of factors, including its proximity to customers, cultural compatibility, cost competitiveness, a highly educated, skilled, English speaking workforce and a robust infrastructure. Invest NI targets investment in sectors that play to these strengths, including financial services, business services and ICT/software. Energy costs are not a significant factor in the investment decisions of companies operating in these sectors.

The Strategic Energy Framework 2010 recognises the impact that high energy costs have on the local business economy and commits to developing a more competitive energy market across Northern Ireland.

From my previous answer to AQW 9158/11-15, you will be aware that although my Department does not set electricity and gas tariffs, it works closely with the Utility Regulator to develop market conditions to put downward pressure on prices. Engagement with the Utility Regulator includes discussions and meetings around the review of regulated energy tariffs, and in relation to price controls, to ensure that retail energy costs are kept as low as possible.

All energy consumers are encouraged to seek out the best deals available from competing supply companies, and business customers are encouraged to use the energy buyers' guides which have been produced by the Utility Regulator and Manufacturing NI.

Northern Ireland businesses can also access capital support for investment in energy saving projects through the Invest NI funded, interest-free, Energy Efficiency Loan Fund managed by Carbon Trust as well as through the UK-wide finance scheme provided by Carbon Trust Implementation Services and Siemens Financial Services.

My Department, along with Invest NI, is considering if direct capital support beyond what is currently available can be provided to existing high energy users within the limits of the EU's State Aid Regulations. Revenue support for deployment of renewable energy technologies is provided through the existing NI Renewable Obligation Certificates (NIROC) regime managed by my Department.

In addition, the UK Government is currently taking steps to establish the "Green Investment Bank" which may be able to assist businesses take steps to reduce the cost of energy consumption in future.

### **CPR: Staff Training**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what strategy is in place to train departmental staff in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

**(AQW 10015/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Department follows Health and Safety guidance to ensure that there is an adequate number of certified First Aiders operating across all locations. The Department has currently 19 staff trained in First Aid, including Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation, and has systems in place to ensure this training is updated by the training provider every three years.

### **Tourism Ireland: Airport Funding**

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQO 1595/11-15, (i) how much of the £1 million invested in Tourism Ireland is directed towards Belfast International Airport; and (ii) what mechanisms are in place to monitor the delivery of Tourism Ireland funding to ensure that the investment is sufficiently proportionate between Northern Ireland's international airport and the Republic of Ireland's international airports.

**(AQW 10017/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Tourism Ireland cannot specify how much of its £1 million co-operative marketing investment has been allocated to Belfast International Airport (BIA), as this information is commercially sensitive. However, I can confirm that a number of airlines which operate services from BIA are participating in the initiative. These are Aer Lingus, easyJet, Jet2 and United.

The £1million co-operative marketing initiative relates to air and sea carriers which operate out of Northern Ireland's airports and ports. No element of this funding has been used to support the marketing activities of carriers which operate out of airports and ports in the Republic of Ireland.

### **Papers for Assembly Committees**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail all occasions in the last 12 months when her Department has made a presentation to an Assembly committee and provided papers pertaining to that presentation to the committee less than 48 hours beforehand.

**(AQW 10035/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The details are contained in the table below:

| <b>Date of meeting</b> | <b>Topic</b>   |
|------------------------|--|
| 22 March 2012          | DETI response to the ETI Inquiry into Developing the Northern Ireland Economy through Innovation, Research and Development |
| 01 December 2011       | Invest NI Performance update   |
| 24 November 2011       | DETI update on the Renewable Heat Incentive consultation.  |
| 30 June 2011           | NITB presentation – The Tourism Opportunity  |
| 23 June 2011           | Invest NI Presentation – Overview of Performance   |
| 02 June 2011           | DETI input into June 2011 Monitoring round   |

## Invest NI: Funding in North Antrim

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much funding InvestNI has allocated to the North Antrim area in each of the last three years; and to list the businesses that have received funding.

**(AQW 10089/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Table 1 shows the amount of assistance, or funding, that Invest NI has offered to companies in the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) in each of the last three financial years.

**Table 1: Invest NI Assistance Offered in North Antrim PCA (2008-09 to 2010-11)**

| Financial Year      | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | Total        |
|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|--------------|
| Total Assistance £m | 2.58    | 6.15    | 6.22    | <b>14.95</b> |

Table 2 lists the names of businesses that were offered the assistance contained in table 1.

**Table 2: Business in North Antrim PCA Offered Invest NI Assistance (2008-09 to 2010-11)**

| BUSINESS NAME  |
|--|
| ADRIAN AUSTIN  |
| AEROSPACE METAL FINISHERS LIMITED                              |
| AEROSUBS LIMITED   |
| AGQUIP LTD   |
| ALEXANDER BONAR & CO., LIMITED                                 |
| ALTERNATIVE ANGLES (A TRIANGLE HOUSING ASSOCIATION INITIATIVE) |
| ASHGROVE CONTRACT FURNITURE LIMITED                            |
| BALLYMENA BUS DEVELOPMENT CTR LTD TSO                          |
| BELL ARCHITECTS LTD  |
| BOVILL LEAD LIMITED  |
| BRIAN JOHNSTON   |
| BUSHMILLS HOTELS LIMITED                                       |
| C & C FRAMES LTD   |
| CARMICHAELS (NI) LIMITED                                       |
| CHRISTIES DIRECT LTD   |
| CIGA HEALTHCARE LIMITED  |
| CLINTY CHEMICALS LTD   |
| CLINTY RE-GEN LIMITED  |
| COATING DEVELOPMENTS 2005 LIMITED                              |
| COLIN DONNELLY   |
| COMPASS ADVOCACY NETWORK LIMITED                               |
| CRAWFORD CONTRACTS GROUP LTD                                   |
| CYRIL REID   |
| DAVID PATTON AND SONS (NI) LTD                                 |
| DIXONS CONTRACTORS LTD   |
| DOHERTY & GRAY LIMITED   |
| DOKO SUSHI LTD   |
| DONTAUR ENGINEERING LIMITED                                    |

| <b>BUSINESS NAME</b>   |
|--|
| DUNBIA (BALLYMENA) LIMITED   |
| E & C INNS LTD   |
| ECOMESH LTD  |
| EDAPHON S-OIL TEC LIMITED  |
| EDDIE FERGUSON   |
| ESTHER ELLIOTT   |
| FEARGHAS QUINN   |
| FENCING SOLUTIONS (NI) LTD   |
| FINISH SPECIALIST CONSTRUCTION PRODUCTS LTD                          |
| FOODSERVICE SUPPORT SOLUTIONS (N.I) LIMITED                          |
| FRANCIS DINSMORE, LIMITED  |
| FRANK & GLORIA ALEXANDER   |
| FRANK MC CAUGHAN JAMES MC CAUGHAN & FRANCIS FARRELL                  |
| FRED & RUTH GIBSON T/A GIBSON CONTRACTS                              |
| G2DATA COMMUNICATIONS LIMITED  |
| GALGORM MANOR HOTEL LIMITED  |
| GARAGE DOOR SYSTEMS LIMITED  |
| GARY HOOD  |
| GARY MC CONNELL  |
| GEORGE FLECK SENIOR, GEORGE FLECK JUNIOR, AGNES FLECK & BRENDA FLECK |
| GIRVAN MACCORKELL, ALISTAIR MACCORKELL & ELIZABETH MACCORKELL        |
| GLENOVATION LIMITED  |
| GRANT'S ELECTRICAL SVS (NI) LTD                                      |
| GROUNDSMAN INDUSTRIES LIMITED  |
| GUY THOMPSON & BRAD HUSTON   |
| H. K. DICKEY   |
| HARRY HARPUR   |
| HAYBURN WOOD PRODUCTS LIMITED  |
| HELEN MARTIN   |
| HUGH ANDERSON  |
| IAN ELLIOTT  |
| INTEC (CONTRACT INTERIORS) LIMITED                                   |
| J. F. & H. DOWDS LIMITED   |
| J.M.F. LTD.  |
| JACKSON TODD   |
| JAMES STEVENSON (QUARRIES) LTD                                       |
| JH INDUSTRIAL CLEANING SERVICES LIMITED                              |
| JOHN BORLAND   |

| <b>BUSINESS NAME</b>  |
|---|
| JOHN MORTON   |
| JOHN SHARKEY  |
| JOHN WARD   |
| JOSEPH HUGHES PAINTING CONTRACTORS LIMITED                      |
| KARMA DESIGN 22 LTD   |
| KBE LIMITED   |
| KENNETH SINCLAIR  |
| LAWSCRIPT (NI) LTD  |
| LORNA AND TONY BOYCE  |
| LOUGHGIEL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION LTD                             |
| M. CLARKE & SONS CONTRACTS LIMITED                              |
| MADDEN BROS LTD   |
| MAINE SURFACE FINISHING LIMITED                                 |
| MAINE TANKERS LIMITED   |
| MARK REA  |
| MARY ELIZABETH LYNN   |
| MCAULEY KITCHENS LIMITED  |
| MCKEOWN FINE FOODS LIMITED                                      |
| MET HEALTHCARE LIMITED  |
| MICHELIN TYRE PLC   |
| MOORE (UNIDRILL) LIMITED  |
| MOORE CONCRETE PRODUCTS LIMITED                                 |
| MOORINGS MEDIQUIP LTD   |
| MR MATTHEW CORDNER & MR IAN MCKEOWN                             |
| MR R MCMULLAN, MRS M MCMULLAN, MRS V MCMULLAN AND MR A MCMULLAN |
| MUGGINSOFT LLP  |
| MULLINSALLAGH LIMITED   |
| NAMPAK PLASTICS EUROPE LIMITED                                  |
| NEW WORLD DEVELOPMENTS LIMITED                                  |
| NORMAN BELL   |
| NORTH ANTRIM BUSINESS AGENCY LTD                                |
| NORTHERN MATERIALS HANDLING (IRELAND) LIMITED                   |
| NU-LOK (IRELAND) LTD  |
| NU-LOK ENVIRONMENTAL PRODUCTS LTD                               |
| O'KANE POULTRY LIMITED  |
| OKOTECH LIMITED   |
| ONUS (NI) LTD   |
| PASCHAL MC LOUGHLIN   |

| <b>BUSINESS NAME</b>  |
|---|
| PATRICK & EILEEN DOUGAN   |
| PATRICK MCNEILL   |
| PAUL SLOAN  |
| PETER DALLAT & BERNADETTE DALLAT                                |
| PETER MCCARTNEY   |
| PETER MCFETRIDGE  |
| PETER O KANE  |
| PETER TAYLOR  |
| R. ROBINSON & SONS (CHARTERED ARCHITECTS & CIVIL ENGINEERS) LTD |
| RAYMOND TODD  |
| REDFLITE LTD  |
| RENEWABLE TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS LTD                              |
| RICHARD MILLAR  |
| ROBERT JOHN & WILLIAM ADRIAN CHERRY                             |
| ROBERT STEWART & ANNA STEWART                                   |
| S J MCAULEY ENGINEERING LIMITED                                 |
| SALMAR CONSTRUCTION LTD   |
| SEAN BLANEY   |
| SELLING SERVICES UK LLP   |
| SHAW AUTOMATION LTD   |
| SIMON AND ANGELA MURRAY   |
| SMITH'S ENGINEERING WORKS (NORTHERN IRELAND) LIMITED            |
| STEPHENS CATERING EQUIPMENT COMPANY LIMITED                     |
| STEVEN HOUSTON T/A RED HEIFER CHEESE                            |
| STEVENSON & COMPANY   |
| SWITCHSOURCE LTD  |
| SYSTEM CONTROLS LIMITED   |
| TAKETHEBISCUIT LTD  |
| THE OLD BUSHMILLS DISTILLERY COMPANY LIMITED                    |
| THE SUFFOLK SHEEP SOCIETY                                       |
| THEONESWITCH LTD  |
| THOMAS POLLOCK  |
| TICKETPAL IRELAND LTD   |
| TONY MORRISON   |
| TRAVAN PRECISION ENGINEERING LTD                                |
| TRIANGLE HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD                                |
| WARWICK ENGINEERING (NI) LIMITED                                |
| WILLIAM MCCAUGHERN  |

|                                |
|--------------------------------|
| <b>BUSINESS NAME</b>           |
| WOODLAND FURNITURE LTD         |
| WOODLAND KITCHENS (NI) LIMITED |
| WRIGHT COMPOSITES LIMITED      |
| WRIGHTBUS LIMITED              |

**NOTE:** The names of 4 companies have been withheld as their inclusion may damage their commercial interests.

### Capital/Revenue Costs: Departmental Spend

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an estimate of the annual additional cost to her Department of providing its services in our divided society, broken down by (i) capital; and (ii) revenue costs.

**(AQW 10092/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Due to the number of variables involved, it is not possible for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to calculate the annual additional cost of service delivery.

### Tourism Ireland: Promotion of Northern Ireland

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what proportion of the Tourism Ireland budget is spent specifically on promoting Northern Ireland.

**(AQW 10139/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** DETI has allocated £14.85million to Tourism Ireland for 2012 to promote Northern Ireland as part of the island of Ireland overseas. Tourism Ireland's total budget for 2012 is £54.57million\*. Tourism Ireland features Northern Ireland prominently as part of its extensive global destination marketing programme.

DETI has also provided an additional £4.7million to boost Tourism Ireland's ni2012 specific promotional activity for Northern Ireland overseas.

\* €62.727million converted at €1:0.87p as per Tourism Ireland 2012 Business Plan

### Belfast International Airport

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what initiatives and support her Department has provided to Belfast International Airport in order to attract new airlines to use the airport.

**(AQW 10141/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** There are a number of ways in which my Department works with Belfast International Airport (BIA). For example, BIA and airlines which operate services from the airport, are participating in a Tourism Ireland Northern Ireland Access Initiative aimed at promoting ease of access, competitive fares and the great range of festivals and events taking place in Northern Ireland as part of ni2012. BIA based airlines participating in the initiative are Aer Lingus, easyJet, Jet2 and United. Another example of co-operation with BIA is Tourism Ireland's continued work with the airport in case-making for the restoration of routes such as a direct service from Toronto to Belfast.

My Department has also been working with BIA to build on the reduction in the rate of Air Passenger Duty (APD) applied to direct long haul flights operating in Band B. This has sent a very positive message to long haul airlines that Northern Ireland is a viable option for long haul business. The Programme for Government has reinforced this message by setting an objective to eliminate the duty applied to direct long haul flights once APD is devolved.

### Tourism: Irish Open

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the expected influx of visitors for the Irish Open Golf Tournament at Portrush, what additional action is being taken to maximise business and tourism potential before, during and after the competition.

**(AQW 10184/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), Tourism Ireland and Invest NI are all working to maximise the opportunities presented by the Irish Open for tourism and business.

In April 2012 NITB will deliver the 'Our Time to T-Off' Irish Open Information Day in the North Coast area aimed at local frontline tourism industry. In addition, a bespoke World Host Customer service training course will be rolled out to front line industry staff over the coming months in partnership with the Northern Regional College, People 1st and Department of Employment and Learning.

NITB is also working closely with the European tour and other stakeholders to ensure that all visitor information messages are sent out via social media and web channels before during and after the Irish Open event.



Tourism Ireland, as part of its "Home of Champions" golf campaign, is urging overseas golf enthusiasts to come and attend the Irish Open and to extend their trip to try out some of our other world class courses.

A specific campaign for GB has been developed to promote the Irish Open and will include a series of advertisements and advertorials promoting a number of special offers to Northern Ireland around the Irish Open on a new website [www.discoverireland.com/irishopen](http://www.discoverireland.com/irishopen).

In the North American market, Tourism Ireland's new 60-second Northern Ireland golf ad kicked off on the Golf Channel in February, airing to millions of golf enthusiasts. Tourism Ireland has arranged three separate Golf Channel special half-hour programmes on Rory McIlroy, Graeme McDowell and Darren Clarke which are each airing three times this spring. Tourism Ireland's media event at the US Masters in Augusta in April will include a special focus on the Irish Open; and key American golf journalists will be invited by Tourism Ireland to visit Northern Ireland in June.

Invest NI is also working alongside NITB and Tourism Ireland on a series of events around the Irish Open that will maximise the potential business opportunities arising from the tournament. The events will help to build and reinforce relationships with key decision makers within companies who are considering investing in Northern Ireland.

### **Belfast International Airport: Police Presence**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the importance of tourist confidence, what discussions she has had with Belfast International Airport concerning its proposal to reduce the police presence at the airport. **(AQW 10186/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Airport Constabulary is a private service recruited and paid for by the owners of Belfast International Airport and is independent of Government. I will be meeting with the airport regarding the proposed reduction in the level of Airport Constabulary given the importance of tourism to the economy.

### **Tourism: Irish Open**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action is being taken to encourage visitors to the Irish Open to stay in accommodation in the Ballycastle area. **(AQW 10222/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) remit is to promote the whole of Northern Ireland to both the domestic and Republic of Ireland markets with a view to increasing visitor numbers and spend.

As one of the key events in the ni2012 programme the Irish Open will be promoted through a bespoke campaign to maximise participation and visitor numbers for the event. The campaign will be developed in conjunction with regional tourism partners, promoting accommodation offers provided across the north coast.

### **Renewable Heat Incentive: Introduction**

**Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the proposed Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive; and when it will be introduced. **(AQW 10239/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** Following the consultation last year on proposals, my Department has been undertaking further analysis on the potential design of the RHI, including a re-assessment of tariff levels, eligible technologies and banding.

This work has been completed and the design of the RHI scheme is being finalised and all necessary approvals are being sought. This includes the necessary State Aid approval, without which the scheme cannot be introduced. The Department is in contact with Brussels on this matter, while the timing of the approval is outside of our control, I would be hopeful that this would be obtained by June. I will therefore provide further information on the launch of the scheme as soon as all approvals are in place.

### **Our Time, Our Place: 'Irish News' Funding**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much money the Irish News has received to market NI 2012 'Our time, Our Place'. **(AQW 10259/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** To date the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has invested £832,000 in promoting the ni2012: Our Time, Our Place campaign. Of this £25,000 has been specifically channelled through the Irish News.

### **Fuel: Driver Strike**

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of recent events in England regarding the striking of fuel tanker drivers, what contingency plans are in place to secure the supply, storage and distribution of fuel. **(AQW 10262/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Department has a Major Emergency Response Plan in place if a national or regional disruption of oil, electricity, gas and other fuels affects Northern Ireland. It would undertake a lead role for fuel supplies under the Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Framework, coordinated by the Office of First Minister and deputy First Minister.

### Geological Survey of Northern Ireland

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) how the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland (GSNI) is constituted; and (ii) whether there is a legal separation between the GSNI and her Department or whether they are the same entity.

**(AQW 10270/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** The Geological Survey of Northern Ireland (GSNI) provides advice to DETI on matters relating to geological mapping, assessment of mineral and energy resources and licensing of prospecting activities. It is currently staffed by 15 geologists and professionals seconded to DETI by the British Geological Survey, a component part of the Natural Environment Research Council.

GSNI is established in accordance with The Minerals (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1959, which states that: 'The Ministry of Commerce [now DETI] shall be the Ministry responsible for the establishment of the Geological Survey and for the administration of all matters relating thereto'.

### Social Tariffs: Energy Service Providers

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions have taken place regarding the introduction of a social tariff for energy service providers.

**(AQW 10275/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** I am already on record as stating that the introduction of social tariffs would be extremely complex and unlikely to solve the hardships caused by fuel poverty. As such, I have had no recent discussions regarding the introduction of social tariffs and have no plans to introduce social tariffs at this time.

### Gas Extraction

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the revenue streams that will flow to the Executive directly from any company extracting gas onshore.

**(AQW 10330/11-15)**

**Mrs Foster:** I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 3910/11-15.

## Department of the Environment

### Schools: Recyclable Waste

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the rate charged by each local council for the collection of recyclable waste from schools.

**(AQW 2129/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):** It is at the discretion of councils whether to charge for collection of recyclable waste from schools or to provide this service free of charge.

Decisions on the collection of waste are a matter for district councils as set out in The Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

A breakdown of the charges levied by council area is attached for your information. At present 14 councils provide collections from schools free of charge.

#### Rates charged by local councils for the collection of recyclable waste from schools

| Antrim | No charge |
|--------|-----------|
| Ards   | No charge |
| Armagh | No charge |

| <b>Antrim</b> | <b>No charge</b>   |
|---------------|--|
| Ballymena     | <p>Call out fee of £11.50, and this covers collection of either</p> <p>1x 1100 litre Bin OR</p> <p>3x 240 litre bins ( Standard Wheelie Bin Size) OR</p> <p>19 Bin bags</p> <p>Additional bins charged as follows</p> <p>1100 litre - £9</p> <p>Large Tote Sack - £9</p> <p>Small Tote sack – £4.50</p> <p>240 litre wheelie bin - £3.50</p> <p>Bin bags - £0.60</p> |
| Ballymoney    | No charge  |
| Banbridge     | Charge a one off collection fee based on the number of black bins which they have and the recyclable waste is weighed and charged at 5p per kg for both green bins with dry recyclables and brown bins with organic waste  |
| Belfast       | <p>Call out fee of £10.50, this covers collection of either</p> <p>1x 1100 litre Bin OR</p> <p>3x 240 litre bins ( Standard Wheelie Bin Size) OR</p> <p>19 Bin bags</p> <p>Additional bins charged as follows</p> <p>1100 litre - £9</p> <p>Large Tote Sack - £9</p> <p>Small Tote sack – £4.50</p> <p>240 litre wheelie bin - £3.50</p> <p>Bin bags - £0.60</p>     |
| Carrickfergus | <p>Call out fee of £10.50, and this covers collection of either</p> <p>1x 1100 litre Bin OR</p> <p>3x 240 litre bins ( Standard Wheelie Bin Size) OR</p> <p>19 Bin bags</p> <p>Additional bins charged as follows</p> <p>1100 litre - £9</p> <p>Large Tote Sack - £9</p> <p>Small Tote sack – £4.50</p> <p>240 litre wheelie bin - £3.50</p> <p>Bin bags - £0.60</p> |
| Castlereagh   | No recycling service to schools  |
| Coleraine     | No charge  |

| <b>Antrim</b>          | <b>No charge</b>  |
|------------------------|---|
| Cookstown              | Current rates (which do not include landfill tax as the waste is recyclable) are based on the number/size of wheeled bin containers as shown below:<br>120 litre £1.20 p/w<br>240 litre £1.95 p/w<br>360 litre £2.80 p/w<br>660 litre £4.95 p/w<br>1100 litre £8.00 p/w   |
| Craigavon              | No charge   |
| Derry                  | No charge   |
| Down                   | No charge   |
| Dungannon and S.Tyrone | No charge   |
| Fermanagh              | No charge   |
| Larne                  | No charge   |
| Limavady               | As an incentive to recycle there is a reduction of 10% off the residual collection charge for collection.<br>120 litre £3.03 p/w<br>240 litre £4.31 p/w<br>360 litre £5.37 p/w<br>660 litre £9.94 p/w<br>1100 litre £16.66 p/w  |
| Lisburn                | £1.32 per 240l bin.   |
| Magherfelt             | No charge   |
| Moyle                  | No charge   |
| Newry and Mourne       | 120 litre fortnightly 26 collections £79.30<br>240 litre fortnightly 26 collections £84.50<br>360 litre fortnightly 26 collections £113.10<br>660 litre fortnightly 26 collections £221.00<br>1100 litre fortnightly 26 collections £338.00   |
| Newtownabbey           | Call out fee of £10.50, and this covers collection of either<br>1x 1100 litre Bin OR<br>3x 240 litre bins ( Standard Wheelie Bin Size) OR<br>19 Bin bags<br>Additional bins charged as follows<br>1100 litre - £9<br>Large Tote Sack - £9<br>Small Tote sack – £4.50<br>240 litre wheelie bin - £3.50<br>Bin bags - £0.60 |
| N.Down                 | No charge   |

| <b>Antrim</b> | <b>No charge</b>   |
|---------------|--|
| Omagh         | 140 litre bin £1.05 per week<br>240 litre bin £2.05 per week<br>360 litre bin £3.00 per week<br>660 litre bin £5.50 per week<br>1100 litre bin £9.15 per week.<br><br>Please note the recyclable and brown bin collections are based on a 20 week alternate collection with the black residual bins. |
| Strabane      | 240 litre bin £3.00<br>330 litre bin £4.00<br>750 litre bin £9.00<br>1100 litre bin £13.00   |

I apologise for the late reply in this AQ due to an oversight in not issuing the AQ to EPD in October 2011.

### **Taxi Licences: Eligibility**

**Mr Easton** asked the Minister of the Environment whether people with criminal convictions are eligible to apply for a taxi licence. **(AQW 6353/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Applicants with criminal convictions are eligible to apply for taxi licences. However, the Department, in assessing such applications through a robust process of checking, is required to assess whether an applicant can be considered to be a fit and proper person to hold a taxi licence, and in practice seeks to maintain a balance between the need to ensure the safety of the public and the need to allow for the rehabilitation of offenders. I have asked officials to advise if fuller guidance or further legislation is required on this issue. In the meantime I attach an Annex outlining the current criteria for assessment. I accept that there is a need for clarity and certainty on this issue.

#### Criteria for the Licensing of PSV Drivers and Operators

Each individual's case will be considered on its merits and the Department's objective is always to ensure that the travelling public are not subjected to unnecessary risk from taxi drivers or operators. The basic statutory requirement placed on the Department of being satisfied that an individual is a "fit and proper person" to hold a taxi licence is best summarised by asking the question "would one be happy to have a member of one's family travel in a vehicle driven or operated by the particular individual".

Each individual must satisfy the relevant Licensing Officer that they are of good character and their previous convictions, if any, provide a good indication of an individual's mental or moral nature, tendency towards violence, dishonesty, or to other unacceptable conduct, together with their likely attitude towards the high level of responsibility placed on, and expected of, each taxi driver or operator. In assessing the merits of each individual's case their convictions, if any, will be taken at face value with the penalty imposed providing an indication as to the seriousness with which the Court viewed a particular offence.

Insofar as PSV licensing is concerned an individual's convictions are graded into "serious" or "minor" categories depending on the nature of the conviction. The brief guide set out below provides some examples of the typical classification given to particular offences:

| <b>Serious Convictions</b> |   | <b>Minor Convictions</b>   |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| *                          | Murder or Manslaughter  | Excess Speed   |
|                            | Any Alcohol related Driving offence   | Careless or Inconsiderate Driving                                      |
| *                          | Any offence involving Violence such as Wounding or Assault, Threats to Kill, Robbery, Criminal Damage or Harassment | Other Minor breaches of the Road Traffic and other related legislation |
| *                          | Any Public Order offence  | Minor breaches of the Taxi Licence legislation                         |
| *                          | Any Sexual offence such as Rape, Gross Indecency, Indecent Assault, Indecent Behaviour                              | Insurance offences   |
| *                          | Any Dishonesty offence such as Burglary, Theft, Handling, Fraud or State benefit related offences                   | Minor State Benefit related offences                                   |
| *                          | Any Drugs related offence   |  |
| *                          | Any Arms or Explosive offence   |  |

| <b>Serious Convictions</b> |   | <b>Minor Convictions</b> |
|----------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| *                          | Any Terrorist related offence such as membership of a proscribed organisation   |                          |
| *                          | Any serious driving offence such as Causing Death by Dangerous Driving or Dangerous Driving                                 |                          |
|                            | Regular and repeated minor offending  |                          |
|                            | Any series of motoring or other offences such as to reveal a low level of responsibility                                    |                          |
| *                          | Particular consideration would apply where offences of this nature are involved and a longer period than 3 years may apply. |                          |

#### New Applicants

Individuals applying for PSV licences are generally expected to have a clear record for at least 3 years in the case of a “serious” conviction and 12 months for “minor” convictions. In respect of “serious” convictions the Department, in the exercise of its discretion, when assessing the merits of each individual case, may require a much longer clear period than 3 years from the date of an individual’s last conviction, release from prison, or entitlement to an ordinary driving licence, for the individual to demonstrate that they are now a “fit and proper person” to hold a taxi licence. This would almost inevitably be so where the most serious of convictions are involved such as murder or serious sexual offences. Similarly, the Department may require a longer clear period than 12 months for a “minor” conviction. Equally, the Department may require a shorter period than 3 years or 12 months depending on the merits of each individual’s case. Further, in the exercise of the Department’s discretion, some “minor” convictions may be allowed subject to a Warning Letter being issued to the individual.

#### Offences committed by an individual during the Currency of a Licence

The above principles apply equally to convictions occurring during the currency of a licence that will result in the licence being suspended for the appropriate period or revoked entirely. Again, the Department may allow some “minor” convictions during the currency of a licence subject to a Warning Letter being issued. It will be a relevant consideration for the Department in reaching its decision as to whether a particular offence was committed while driving a Public Service Vehicle. Where an ordinary driving licence has been suspended by the Courts consideration will be given to whether the Court has restricted the suspension to certain vehicles for an employment related reason.

#### Failure to Declare Convictions to the Department

Failure by an individual to declare all convictions on an application, of whatever type, is taken seriously and is seen as an attempt to mislead the Department and obtain a licence by misrepresentation. In the case of “minor” convictions individuals will generally be given a second opportunity to declare their convictions although this will not preclude the Department from refusing, suspending or revoking a licence as appropriate because of the nature of the conviction or from the Department viewing the failure to declare as an attempt to mislead and a reason in itself for refusal, suspension, or revocation. For “serious” convictions the individual’s failure to declare will generally be taken as another reason to refuse an application, or suspend or revoke a current licence as appropriate.

#### Other Reasons for the Suspension or Revocation of a Current Licence

It should also be noted that Regulations provide for suspension or revocation of a licence in any of the following circumstances:

- a If the licence has been obtained by misrepresentation
- b If an individual fails to comply with any of the conditions upon which the licence has been granted
- c If the individual has been convicted of an offence under the legislation or any regulations made there under
- d If the individual, for any medical reason is unable to exercise his calling without risk to the public
- e If the individual by his conduct demonstrates that they are not a fit and proper person to hold a licence

#### Decision Making Process in respect of Taxi Licence Applications for Applicants with convictions

- 1 Consider each individual case on its own merits
- 2 Consider the contents of the Applicant’s application form
- 3 Consider any representations made by the Applicant or any other person on his behalf
- 4 Compare and contrast the Applicant’s application form against the PV8 obtained from the CRO
- 5 Apply the Guidelines in relation to the Applicant’s convictions and his disclosure of same
- 6 Decide whether the conviction/s of the Applicant, if any, should be classed as serious or minor
- 7 Apply the appropriate general period of rehabilitation under the Guidelines to the Applicant’s case

- 8 In making the assessment required by statute as to whether the specific Applicant is a "fit and proper person" to hold a taxi licence, consider whether there is any reason to depart from the Guidelines in the specific case by requiring the Applicant to undergo a shorter or longer rehabilitation period than would normally be the case under the Guidelines.
- 9 Make the decision and inform the Applicant in the normal way always stating the reason for the refusal and, if applicable at the time of the decision, the time when the Department will return the licence if suspended.
10. Be prepared to provide fuller reasons by reference to the Criteria etc. if asked by the Applicant or his legal representative.

### Dipped Headlights

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has considered requiring drivers to drive with dipped headlights on, at all times between October and March.

**(AQW 7242/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Drivers are required, under the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations (NI) 2000, to use dipped headlights (in addition to their use at night) during daytime when visibility is seriously reduced, for example in adverse weather conditions or in dull daytime weather.

Under Directive 2008/89/EC all new types of passenger cars and small delivery vans must, from 7 February 2011, be equipped with Daytime Running Lights (DRL). New types of trucks and buses will be required to do so from 7 August 2012. Such lights are expected to increase road safety as they raise the visibility of motor vehicles for other road users. They also have a low energy consumption rate compared with existing "dipped-beam" headlights.

I consider it appropriate to rely on the requirement for manufacturers to fit dedicated DRL lights rather than dictate that drivers should turn on their headlamps during the day. Headlamp bulbs have a limited life and using them during the day would increase the frequency of bulb failure. The European Commission has estimated that headlight bulbs used in such a way would need to be replaced twice as frequently. This could result in a rise in the number of vehicles driven at night with malfunctioning headlights.

In addition, headlamps generally consume more power than DRL so there would also be an increase in fuel consumption as well as CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. I understand from research carried out by Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) that dipped beam headlights consume approximately 160 watts of electrical power whereas DRL lights using filament lights consume 42 watts. It is therefore estimated that DRL lights consume 74% less power than dipped beams with the associated fuel consumption increase for DRL likely to be between 0.3% and 0.5%, and for daytime dipped beams between 1% and 1.8%.

I understand that the average driver uses around 1,275 litres of fuel each year, so even a 1% increase in fuel used could result in additional usage per driver of 12.75 litres per annum – at a price of over £1.40 per litre this could cost an NI motorist an extra £18 a year and NI motorists collectively in excess of £15 million per year. A requirement to use dipped headlights would effectively add a further 1.4p a litre to the NI fuel price. It could be argued that such an increase would inevitably be borne by the less well off, that is those who are more likely to have an older car.

I also consider that a requirement for drivers to switch on headlights during daytime hours could be time consuming and difficult for the police to enforce. In addition, the cycle and motorcycle lobbies are likely to be concerned at the relative lack of conspicuity that would be imposed on them were such a requirement to be imposed and the possible increase in accidents as a consequence. Pedal cycles do not have dipped headlights and motorcycles currently rely on being brighter than other vehicles to improve their conspicuity.

There might be some safety benefits from such a requirement, though most likely not as many as in countries with northern climates and daylight patterns or with large forest areas where vehicles can "vanish" into the background. The main benefits would be the ability to see other vehicles better and to distinguish the moving vehicle from parked ones.

I have sought the advice of the PSNI and AA on this issue. Both organisations are cautious about the proposal. Consequently, I do not intend to take this issue forward.

### Hydraulic Fracturing

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 6424/11-15, (i) to detail the chemical constituents, including CAS numbers, of the chemical compounds; and (ii) whether his Department has any more specific information on (a) where the fresh water was obtained; and (b) the disposal of the waste water and how it was treated prior to disposal.

**(AQW 7524/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** It has come to the attention of my Private Office that this AQW has not been answered. When the question was tabled on 1 February 2012, it should have been transferred to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) as the department which answered the original AQW (6424/11-15).

This transfer did not take place. To receive an answer to this AQW, the Member is requested to retable the question to DETI.

The Department's Private Office procedures have been reviewed and amended to ensure that a similar situation does not reoccur.

## Ulster Way: Extension

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to hold discussions with the Dublin Government in relation to the extension of the Ulster Way to all nine counties in Ulster.

**(AQW 8166/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Officials have been in contact with the relevant County Councils in the Republic of Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and the National Trails Office and they have all indicated that they have no current plans to develop further off-road routes which could connect with or create new sections of the Ulster Way. The Republic of Ireland's future plans for long distance, quality trails are outlined in "Setting New Directions, a review of National Waymarked Ways in Ireland" published in 2010 by the National Trails Office and the Irish Sports Council.

However, there are a number of National Waymarked Ways in the Republic of Ireland which have linkages to the Ulster Way or which are within 10 miles of it. These are:

- The Tain Way, a circular route around the Cooley Mountains, overlaps with a short part of the Ulster Way in Co Louth;
- The Monaghan Way which commences less than 10 miles from the Ulster Way;
- The Cavan Way which meets the Ulster Way in Blacklion and leads from Blacklion to Dowra; and
- The Bluestack Way from Donegal to Ardara which commences less than 10 miles from the Ulster Way.

While these provide interesting additional walking options none are well suited to be part of the circular Ulster Way. There are options to update the Ulster Way website to inform walkers of these routes and how they can connect with them and officials will arrange for this to be undertaken.

I am aware that there are two cross border proposals to use part of the current route of the Ulster Way. A route for the International Appalachian Trail from Slieve League to Ballycastle has been described but not signed. Officials in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency have received a request to discuss development of this route and a steering group meeting has been organised for 5 April 2012. The proposed St Patrick's Trail from Downpatrick to Armagh is under development by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board as a pilgrimage route which may be extended to Croagh Patrick, however officials understand that the Republic of Ireland is not currently in a position to develop this route.

I also met with Jimmy Deenihan, Minister for Arts, Heritage & Gaeltacht Affairs in Dublin on 28 March 2012 to discuss this matter.

## District Councils: Legal Services

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the district councils that (i) tender; and (ii) do not tender for legal services.

**(AQW 8684/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The information requested is provided in the attached table.

| Tender                           | Do not tender                              |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Antrim Borough Council           | Ballymoney Borough Council                 |
| Ards Borough Council             | Banbridge District Council *               |
| Armagh City and District Council | Belfast City Council ^                     |
| Ballymena Borough Council        | Carrickfergus Borough Council              |
| Cookstown District Council       | Castlereagh Borough Council                |
| Craigavon Borough Council        | Coleraine Borough Council *                |
| Lisburn City Council             | Derry City Council                         |
| Newtownabbey Borough Council     | Down District Council ^                    |
| North Down Borough Council       | Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council |
|                                  | Fermanagh District Council *               |
|                                  | Larne Borough Council                      |
|                                  | Limavady Borough Council                   |
|                                  | Magherafelt District Council               |
|                                  | Moyle District Council                     |
|                                  | Newry & Mourne District Council **         |
|                                  | Omagh District Council                     |



| Tender | Do not tender             |
|--------|---------------------------|
|        | Strabane District Council |

^ Please note Belfast City Council has its own in-house legal department and therefore does not need to tender. Down District Council also uses this legal facility.

\* reported that although they do not formally tender they seek competition from a formal approved panel of solicitors.

\*\* reported that it does tender for HR legal services.

I have asked for further information on this issue which may raise questions.

### Marine Bill: Crown Estate

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has consulted or has had any discussions with the Crown Estate in relation to the Marine Bill; and to outline what was consulted upon or discussed.

**(AQW 8970/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Crown Estate is routinely consulted by the Department on a range of marine issues, such as the new marine licensing system which became operational in April 2011 and the Marine Policy Statement which was adopted in March 2011 under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. The Department consulted the Crown Estate on the policy proposals for the Northern Ireland Marine Bill.

The Crown Estate has also been notified of the intention to produce a Northern Ireland marine plan.

In addition, the Department has ongoing discussions on the Marine Bill and other marine issues with the adjoining administrations in Dublin, Edinburgh, London and Cardiff. Notification of the intention to produce a marine plan has also been sent to these administrations.

### Marine Bill: Leasing Rights

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Marine Bill continues to give the Crown Estate, or its agent, exclusive leasing rights to the sea-bed.

**(AQW 8971/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Crown Estate was established as a trust at arm's length from Government, which operates under a commercial mandate contained in the Crown Estate Act 1961.

The Northern Ireland Marine Bill does not alter the Crown Estate Act 1961.

Of course I have been following with interest the Scottish Government's attempts to press for devolution of the Crown Estate in Scotland.

I am of the view that the administration and revenues of the crown estate should be devolved to NI.

### Wild Birds: Invasive Alien Species

**Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the EU rules and regulations on Invasive Alien Species.

**(AQW 9178/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** It is currently a requirement under both the 'Wild Birds' and 'Habitats' Directives that Member States seek to prevent the introduction of Invasive Alien Species that may pose a threat to native flora and fauna.

The European Commission (EC) recognises there is currently no comprehensive instrument at EU level to tackle invasive alien species from the perspective of protecting biodiversity. Responding to this gap, the EC adopted a Communication in 2008: "Towards an EU Strategy on Invasive Species" I

In 2011, the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 was launched, including the targets:

- by 2020, Invasive Alien Species (IAS) and their pathways are identified and prioritised,
- priority species are controlled or eradicated,
- pathways are managed to prevent the introduction and establishment of new IAS

There is an overall action aimed at filling policy gaps in combating IAS by developing a dedicated legislative instrument by 2012. The EC launched a consultation on a dedicated legislative instrument on 27 January 2012.

The Department is monitoring developments carefully in order to assess what legislative implications may arise.

## Aarhus Convention

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the terms of the Aarhus Convention in Northern Ireland.  
(AQW 9189/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** The Aarhus Convention establishes a number of rights of the public (individuals and their associations) with regard to the environment. The Parties to the Convention are required to make the necessary provisions so that public authorities (at national, regional or local level) will contribute to these rights to become effective. The UK ratified the Convention on 24 February 2005 and, in line with the Convention's procedures, became a full party to the Convention 90 days after this date, in May 2005. The Convention provides for:

- the right of everyone to receive environmental information that is held by public authorities ("access to environmental information").
- the right to participate in environmental decision-making ("public participation in environmental decision-making");
- the right to review procedures to challenge public decisions that have been made without respecting the two above mentioned rights or environmental law in general ("access to justice").

The Aarhus Convention is applied throughout Europe mostly by way of a number of EU Regulations or Directives, which are required to be transposed into domestic legislation by Member States.

The most specific pieces of EU legislation which address the Aarhus Convention are the Environmental Information Directive (2003/4/EC), the Public Participation Directive (2003/35/EC) and the Industrial Emissions Directive (2010/75/EC), which replaces the old Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive.

The Environmental Information Directive was transposed on a UK-wide basis by way of the Environmental Information Regulations 2005, under which public authorities must make environmental information available to the public by electronic means which are easily accessible. All public authorities – not just government departments - must also take reasonable steps to organize the environmental information they hold relevant to their functions with a view to the active and systematic dissemination of the information to the public. DOE and most other government departments have achieved this by way of publication schemes which are available on the various departmental websites.

The Environmental Information Regulations also require any public authority that holds environmental information to make it available on request, as soon as possible and no later than 20 working days after the date of receipt of the request, unless there are specific circumstances which prevent a reply within the timescale or there are exceptions to disclosure as set out in Part 3 of the Regulations. There is also a right of appeal for anyone who is not content with the information they receive, through the Information Commissioner.

The Public Participation Directive (PPD) has been transposed in a number of ways. For example, in 2009, public participation requirements were inserted after Article 19 of the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997 and these changes ensure that all plans and programmes, such as the Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy and NI Waste Prevention Programmes will undergo public participation activities and consultation during development. In fact, as part of the process of revising the NI Waste Management Strategy, which is required to be revised under the Waste Framework Directive by December 2012, DOE has held focus group meetings with key stakeholders in keeping with PPD requirements. Article 31 of the Waste Framework Directive specifically attracts the PPD.

So too do Articles 24 and 25 of the Industrial Emissions Directive, which has only recently come into force across Europe and, for the most part is not required to be transposed into NI legislation until January 2013. These requirements will, of course, be included in the transposing legislation, which, incidentally, is shortly to be consulted upon.

In summary, by placing documents and legislation on websites, by developing publications schemes and by making public registers readily available electronically, by responding to environmental queries in a timely and informative manner, by engaging in public participation activities in environmental decision making, such as carrying out consultation exercises and by proving access to justice, the Department of the Environment and other Government Departments, are continually striving to ensure compliance with the Aarhus Convention.

## Tree Preservation Orders: Convictions

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment how many people have been convicted for breaches of Tree Preservation Orders in each of the last five years.  
(AQW 9373/11-15)

**Mr Attwood:** The Department's IT system was upgraded in March 2009 and only live case information as of the 1 April 2009 was backdated into the upgraded system; hence information is only available from that date.

During the last three business years, the number of enforcement cases investigated relating to the alleged cutting down, uprooting or wilfully destroying a tree, or wilfully damaging, topping or lopping a tree protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) are set out in the table below.

| <b>Table 1: Cases investigated</b>   | <b>2009/10</b> | <b>2010/11</b> | <b>2011/12</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Work to Tree(s) in Conservation Area | 5              | 8              | 7              | <b>20</b>    |

| <b>Table 1: Cases investigated</b> | <b>2009/10</b> | <b>2010/11</b> | <b>2011/12</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Work to Tree(s) with TPO           | 38             | 32             | 39             | <b>109</b>   |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>43</b>      | <b>40</b>      | <b>46</b>      | <b>129</b>   |

It is important to note that the vast majority of breaches of planning control are resolved informally through negotiation with the owner/occupier or through the submission and consideration of a retrospective planning application.

Of the 129 cases, one prosecution resulted from the destruction of trees protected by a TPO. In November 2011, a Co Tyrone man was fined £5,000 with court costs of £85 at Omagh Magistrates' Court for a breach of a DOE Tree Preservation Order.

Whilst only one prosecution has resulted from the above investigations on cases opened in the last three business years, 53 (41%) of the 129 cases when investigated did not breach planning control; and 17 (13%) were remedied/planning permission granted.

A summary of closure reasons are set out in table 2 below.

**Table 2: Reason for Closure**

|              | <b>No Breach</b> | <b>Not Expedient</b> | <b>Planning Permission Granted</b> | <b>Remedied/ Resolved</b> | <b>Immune from Enforcement Action</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|--------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Cases Closed | 53               | 20                   | 3                                  | 14                        | 1                                     | <b>91</b>    |

As of the 20 March 2012, 38 of the 129 cases relating to the alleged cutting down, uprooting or wilfully destroying a tree, or wilfully damaging, topping or lopping a tree protected by a Tree Preservation Order remain 'live'.

### **Car Parks: Operating Illegally in Belfast**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment how many illegal car parks have operated outside Belfast since 2007; and how many have been closed down.

**(AQW 9374/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Since becoming Minister I have made it clear that enforcement must be given high priority across my Department and have implemented a number of measures aimed at providing a more robust approach to unauthorised development.

Based on confirmation provided by each Area Office (excluding Belfast Area Office) 20 enforcement cases relating to alleged unauthorised car parks were investigated since 1 April 2009.

Of the 20 enforcement cases investigated since 1 April 2009, 8 have now been closed for the following reasons: -

In four cases, the breach was remedied/resolved in that the use ceased; no breach was identified in two cases and planning permission was granted in two cases.

The Department is committed to resolving all cases involving alleged unauthorised development, including any consequent enforcement action without undue delay.

### **Questions for Written Answer: Departmental Delay**

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 740/11-15, why there was a delay of over eight months in answering this question.

**(AQW 9384/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I accept that there was an inordinate delay in providing a response to Assembly Question 740/11-15. Procedures have now been put in place to avoid such a reoccurrence. I regret the situation that arose.

In your original question you asked about cuts to two separate work areas – (a) the Historic Monuments Scheduling Programme, and (b) the Countryside Management Scheme, and for my assessment of how any cuts might impact on the conservation of archaeological sites and monuments.

At that time, you also asked about other cuts affecting the built heritage, specifically the archaeological heritage: AQWs 220/11-15 and 739/11-15 refer. The issues raised in the above AWQs were all inter-related.

The financial reductions that were being considered at the beginning of the 2011-12 financial year, which impacted on all areas of the Department, were as a consequence of the challenging financial position the Department faced following the outcome of the Executive's Budget process and the continuing decline in planning income which the Department was seeking to make good through internal reductions to other budgets. However, as previously stated, through the careful management of my Department's budget during the financial year, I have been able to re-instate some archaeological support in the areas concerned for the entire financial year.

The difficulties arising from the financial uncertainty were compounded by the ending of one set of contracts that had been used to deliver professional support to a range of work areas, and subsequent delays in the initiation of new contracts that would have covered, at least in part, some of those work areas. The alternative delivery mechanism has now been secured, as a result of a new Framework contract awarded in December 2011. The current position is that we now have a number of temporary workers in post, focusing on discrete work areas, including the Scheduling Programme and work on DARD's Countryside Management Scheme.

### Road Safety Education Officers: School Visits

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of the Environment how many visits Road Safety Education Officers have made to schools in the (i) 2009/10 academic year; (ii) 2010/11 academic year; and (iii) this academic year to date.

**(AQW 9388/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The numbers of schools visits made by Road Safety Education Officers (RSEOs) are as follows:-

| Academic Year | 2009 - 2010 | 2010 - 2011 | 2011 - 2012 (to date) |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
|               | 4420        | 3677        | 238                   |

School visits for the current academic year are significantly reduced due to the prioritisation being given to the implementation of the recommendations of a recent independent review of the Road Safety Education Officer Service.

Road Safety Education Officers (RSEOs) continue to provide schools with the same level of support for the various road safety schemes, such as the Cycling Proficiency Scheme, the Practical Child Pedestrian Safety Training Scheme and the Motor Vehicle Road User GCSE course, as they develop mechanisms to evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency.

However, in order to implement the recommendations and create a modernised Service, it has been necessary to make changes to how RSEOs currently operate in the short term. It is therefore not generally possible to facilitate routine visits to schools for the purpose of conducting road safety talks or interactive presentations.

In the current academic year, the traditional first contact visit by RSEOs was made through the post and the subsequent follow up contact was by way of phone or e-mail. This accounts for approximately 2,400 visits that do not appear in this year's figure of 238 visits. RSEO's are still available to provide advice, guidance and support throughout the year, by means of telephone and e-mail contact.

Recognising the service that RSEOs would not be able to provide during the implementation period, all schools were informed of the position and additional assistance to teachers was provided in the form of new Skooter Assembly Packs which were delivered to Primary Schools at the end of last academic year. This pack is interactive and covers the full range of road safety topics appropriate to all levels of Primary School Education. The modules contained within the Assembly Packs can be used by teachers as standalone modules or as part of a full road safety presentation.

In addition RSEO's are developing 'Road Safety' presentations which can be used by teaching staff to deliver road safety messages. These new resources should allow for the delivery of the road safety message, in line with the best practice guidelines, by professional teaching staff on a regular structured way through the curriculum to continue.

It is the Department's aim to emerge from this transitional phase with a modern, improved Road Safety Education Officer Service that is more integrated, results focussed and better placed to play a key role in delivering evidenced based and fully evaluated activities that meet the demands of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy to 2020.

### Cycling Proficiency Scheme: Teacher Training

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of the Environment for his Department's assessment of the training for teachers who are taking part in the National Cycling Proficiency Scheme, and whether the training ensures an acceptable overall standard throughout Northern Ireland.

**(AQW 9389/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Approximately 580 primary schools participate in the Cycling Proficiency Scheme (CPS) with an average of 8,800 – 9,000 children trained each year. Teachers who are new to the subject are given extensive training on how to deliver the course. This training includes i) briefing on the forms and materials used and the general administrative requirements, ii) instruction on how to check bicycles for road worthiness and safety, iii) assistance on how to instruct the children complete the various exercises and iv) the final assessment, which places particular emphasis on the standard to be attained in order to pass the test. A training DVD is also provided, along with an instructor's pack, which is used by the teacher to prepare for and design future lessons.

Once the scheme starts further assistance is on hand, should the teacher require it, and the Road Safety Education Officer (RSEO) returns to the school to check on progress and to ensure that standards are maintained throughout the course. The RSEO carries out the initial testing of the pupils with the teacher observing. Only when the RSEO is satisfied that the teacher is capable of taking the course on their own are they allowed to carry out the training unsupervised. Teachers are assessed every four years as part of a rolling assessment programme carried out by the RSEO, all of which is designed to ensure that an acceptable overall standard is maintained throughout Northern Ireland.

Following a recent review of the Road Safety Education Officer Service, the Department commissioned an independent review of CPS to examine the content of the course and methods of delivery to ensure that these are up to date and are fit for purpose. The review will also evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme in terms of reducing child road safety casualties and to determine if the scheme appropriately addresses today's road safety issues. It is anticipated that the review team will report to the Department before the end of this calendar year.

### **Taxi Drivers: Mandatory Requirements**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the benefits of (i) introducing mandatory requirements for taxi drivers to ensure that vehicle engines are running efficiently and thus creating fewer emissions; (ii) introducing a taxi clean-up programme which would involve cleaning the fuel pump and injectors, engine, gearbox, and EGR systems and the replacement where necessary of fuel, oil and air filters; (iii) demonstrating the effectiveness of such measures by carrying out an emissions test and fuel efficiency test before and after the clean-up; (iv) requiring taxi drivers to undertake the programme and introduce a charge to recoup the costs; and (v) promoting the programme with reference to studies which show that fuel efficiency can be increased by between 5-10 percent.

**(AQW 9404/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I am committed to encouraging all drivers to maintain their vehicles in good condition, one of the results of which is to support limiting the levels of vehicle emissions.

Turning specifically to taxis, they are subject to annual testing from new and not just from 4 years old as with the normal car MOT test. A more rigorous assessment therefore already exists for taxis than for private cars. Construction and Use Regulations require such vehicles to be maintained in good and efficient working order and indeed it is an offence to use a taxi if its emissions exceed the emissions standards it was designed to meet due to inadequate maintenance.

Such taxi vehicle tests are intended to identify vehicles with major emissions control system failures. Whilst the test is not sensitive enough to detect or quantify small changes in emissions performance and cannot give an indication of fuel economy, using good quality fuel should nonetheless prevent excessive build-up of deposits on fuel injectors that may interfere with their good working. Regular engine lubricating oil changes may also minimise wear that can increase emissions.

There are a range of actions that taxi drivers – and indeed all drivers – can take to improve engine performance. I believe that these are best undertaken by individual drivers, taking appropriate advice from vehicle manufacturers and suitable qualified mechanics. These will include replacing oil in the gearbox and transmission system which might achieve a slight improvement in fuel economy, although I understand it is best to follow the manufacturer's recommendations as to how this can be achieved. Carrying out a programme as described in the question has appeal and may produce benefits, but may also result in increased fares to cover the cost, be placing an additional responsibility on an industry already facing difficulties in the current economic climate and at a time of radical change in taxi regulation. Clearly, making vehicles more efficient is desirable on financial and environmental grounds, but the measures suggested may be more than can be justified in current circumstances.

### **Quoile River: Water Management and Pollution**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the issues identified in the Environment Agency's leaflet 'Quoile: Local Area Management Information' in relation to the water management and pollution of the Quoile River; and (ii) what action it has taken to address the issues.

**(AQW 9405/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) were published in December 2009 to meet one of the key requirements of the Water Framework Directive. The Plans, which cover all of Northern Ireland, identify where the water environment needs to be protected or improved, the timeframe to make these improvements and how that can be achieved. The Plans included information leaflets for 26 Local Management Areas (LMAs).

The implementation of the RBMPs is being taken forward through the development and implementation of 26 LMA action plans over a three year rolling programme from 2010/11 to 2012/13. The Quoile LMA action plan is due to be completed by the end of March 2012. The main issues identified include elevated phosphorus levels, low dissolved oxygen and impacts in invertebrate communities. Implementation actions include additional targeted biological monitoring, awareness raising, targeted river walks to identify pollution hotspots and inspections of premises where there is the potential to cause water pollution.

Following a major fish kill in 2008, a Quoile Catchment Working Group was set up. The Group discussed the need to model different management options for improving water quality in the Quoile Pondage.

NIEA has recently commissioned the development of a computer model to assess different management scenarios (for example, improvements to the barrage, siphoning out deep de-oxygenated water, dredging etc.) to reduce the risk of the dissolved oxygen in the Pondage falling below the critical 4mg/l level required to support fish. This should be available for use by April 2012.

In addition, Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute operates a 'real time' telemetry buoy in the Quoile. If Dissolved Oxygen values change uncharacteristically then a call is automatically logged on the NIEA Water Pollution hotline so that it can be investigated.

All this work is coordinated through the Strangford & Lecale Catchment Management Officer and presented at bi-annual Catchment Stakeholder Group meetings. The Quoile LMA Action Plan, and an updated on the computer model will be discussed at the spring meeting, scheduled for 2 May 2012. Details of the meetings including a presentation given at the autumn meeting

on water quality planning in the Quoile LMA are available on the DOE website. [http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/water-home/wfd/public\\_partic\\_3/catchment\\_stakeholder\\_groups/strangford\\_and\\_lecale.htm](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/water-home/wfd/public_partic_3/catchment_stakeholder_groups/strangford_and_lecale.htm).

### **Woodland: UK Forestry Standard**

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of the Environment whether all the bodies or organisations within his Department's remit which own woodland are compliant with the UK Forestry Standard, including his Department, any arm's-length body and any organisation to which his Department provides grant aid.

**(AQW 9581/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The significant areas of woodland within DoE ownership lie within the properties managed by The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) as country parks, nature reserves and historic monuments in state care or by other environmental bodies with which it has management agreements.

While NIEA has not yet applied to DARD Forest Service to register under the UK Forestry Standard the woodlands which it or its agents manage, the Agency believes that were it to do so the management would be compliant with all relevant legislation and with the UKFS guidelines save those relating to commercial timber production, in which neither NIEA nor its agents are engaged. As staff resources allow, NIEA intends to register its woodland holdings under the UKFS.

NIEA provides grant aid or management payments to approaching fifty organisations including: Local Councils, environmental NGOs, schools, community groups and education providers. Only a few have any involvement in forestry or woodland management. NIEA has provided grant support to one council and four e-NGOs for nine woodland projects since January 2011. It has management agreements with three NGOs over areas of woodland. Of the two main recipients, one is accredited under the independent UK Woodland Assurance Scheme and the other under the international Forest Stewardship Council.

NIEA letters of offer contain the following standard condition to ensure compliance with any relevant laws: The Applicant must comply with the provisions of all enactments, statutory provisions and other laws operating in Northern Ireland including, but not only, those relating to planning, nature conservation, animal welfare, access, equal opportunities, fair employment and health and safety. European law, where applicable, must also be followed.

This condition should ensure that any project currently funded by NIEA's natural heritage grant programme complies with any legislation included in the UKFS. NIEA will consider adding a condition requiring the registration under UKFS of woodlands for which it offers grant aid.

### **Rural Dwellers: Non-farming**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to ensure that non-farming rural dwellers are able to build a dwelling in their local area.

**(AQW 9593/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** PPS21 already offers considerable development opportunities for non-farming rural people wishing to build a dwelling in the countryside, not just farmers. It does this by providing for: Replacement dwellings (Policy CTY 3); The conversion and reuse of non-residential buildings as dwellings (Policy CTY 4); New dwellings within an existing cluster or ribbon of buildings (Policy CTY 8); Social and affordable housing schemes (Policy CTY 5); Development within designated Dispersed Rural Communities (Policy CTY 2); and a dwelling to meet compelling personal or domestic circumstances (Policy CTY 6).

However, in recognition of the continued interest in this issue, I met with 3 of the members of the Independent Working Group on Non-farm Rural Dwellers set up by the previous Executive as part of my review of the operation of PPS21. I was interested to hear their expert perspectives first hand as too the views of MLAs, councillors and others with knowledge and interest and have taken these into account in the review. Work on the review is now nearing completion and I will be making a statement to the Assembly in the near future.

### **Vehicle Tax Renewal Fees**

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to discuss the differing rates of vehicle tax renewal fees with the Secretary of State for Transport, given that people who are unable to afford the annual renewal fee opt for the six month option which is more expensive.

**(AQW 9622/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I am very aware of the difficulties being faced by many motorists from households and business across Northern Ireland in meeting the costs of keeping vehicles on the road.

The method of calculating the amount of duty chargeable for a six-month tax disc, at the rate of 55% of the annual rate, is set in the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994.

As responsibility for vehicle excise duty rests with the Department for Transport and the Treasury, I will write to the Secretary of State for Transport, highlighting the difficulties that many people in Northern Ireland are facing and urging her to review the charging mechanism for a six-month tax disc and to reduce the additional charge faced by drivers who cannot afford to buy 12-month discs.

## Planning Permission: Special Circumstances

**Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many people have been granted planning permission under special circumstances in each of the last three years; and (ii) to provide details of the special circumstances.

**(AQW 9631/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Table 1 below shows the number of planning applications approved under special circumstances in each of the last three years.

**Table 1**

| Year   | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|
| Total no. of planning applications granted under special circumstances | 35      | 21      | 13      |

**Note:** 2011/12 figures are up to December 2011.

Policy CTY6 (Personal and Domestic Circumstances) of Planning Policy Statement 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside will allow a dwelling to be permitted in the countryside for the long term needs of an applicant, where there are compelling and site specific reasons for this related to the applicant's personal or domestic circumstances.

Personal circumstances can include the debilitating effects of a slow illness and the consequent need for care by family. Such cases could also include instances where a young adult requires a continuing and high level of care, but who could also benefit from a greater degree of independent living. All permissions granted under Policy CTY 6 are subject to a condition restricting the occupation of the dwelling to a named individual and their dependents.

Of the 69 applications approved in Table 1, 58 were approved under personal and domestic circumstances.

Policy CTY 7 (Dwellings for Non-Agricultural Business Enterprises) of Planning Policy Statement 21 states that planning permission will be granted for a dwelling house in connection with an established non-agricultural business enterprise where a site specific need can be clearly demonstrated that makes it essential for one of the firm's employees to live at the site of their work.

Of the 69 applications approved in Table 1, 11 were granted subject to a condition restricting occupation of the dwelling for the use of the business.

There are a number of factors including special circumstances to be considered in reaching a balanced decision in a planning application. It is recognised that the final determination in relation to a planning application rests with DOE Planning who will consider all relevant material considerations.

## Media Communications Protocols

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of the Environment what media communications protocols exist between his Department and each of its arm's-length bodies; and to publish these protocols.

**(AQW 9656/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** No media communications protocols exist between my Department and each of its arm's-length bodies.

## Cycling Proficiency Scheme: Road Training

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment whether there are plans to include road training in the Cycling Proficiency Scheme in schools.

**(AQW 9687/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Cycling Proficiency Scheme (CPS) already has an on-road element built into the training programme. It is offered to all of the 849 primary schools in Northern Ireland each year; however, the majority of teachers have been reluctant to include the on-road cycling experience for safety and public liability reasons. The CPS scheme equates to level 2 of the National Standards if on-road training is taken up by the school.

## Road Safety: DOE Spend

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent in total on road safety in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9712/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Department undertakes a wide range of activities to improve road safety which include:

- bringing forward a range of policy & legislation;
- employing Road Safety Education Officers;
- commissioning advertising and other media campaigns;
- engaging with stakeholders through various Forums;
- operating a community road safety grant scheme;

- undertaking research; and
- coordinating the implementation of the Road Safety Strategy.

The Department's estimated total expenditure within these activities in each of the last 5 years is as follows:

| Year              | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total Expenditure | £5.151m | £4.968m | £4.713m | £4.819m | £5.205m |

The Road Safety campaign – particularly the 'Crashed Lives' campaign – has been a factor in the reduction of road deaths and serious injuries over recent years. That is why I believe the campaign budget of DOE needs to be safeguarded. That said, I am interrogating campaign costs, delivery options, the appropriate balance between television and other campaign outlets etc.

### **AQW 6675/11-15**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to provide an answer to AQW 6675/11-15 which was due on 2 February 2012.

**(AQW 9754/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The response to AQW 6675/11-15 issued on 29 March 2012.

### **Rural Areas: Building Use**

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of the Environment what incentives are available to encourage the improved use of buildings in rural areas with a view to providing accommodation.

**(AQW 9756/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Department of the Environment provides funding for the repair and maintenance of listed buildings in the North, including those in rural areas. However, it does not offer financial incentives specifically for the improved use of buildings in rural areas for accommodation.

The existing planning policy framework does however support development proposals for the conversion and reuse of existing buildings in the countryside for the purposes of providing residential accommodation, including proposals for the use of existing buildings for tourism purposes.

PPS 21 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside' supports the sympathetic conversion and re-use of existing buildings in the countryside principally through policies CTY 3 'Replacement Dwellings', CTY 4 'The Conversion and Reuse of Existing Buildings', and CTY 11 'Farm Diversification'. Additional guidance and advice on 're-use' is contained within draft Supplementary Planning Guidance to PPS21 titled 'Building on Tradition' which will soon be published in final form, subject to Executive Committee endorsement.

PPS 6 'Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage' provides planning policies which support the retention of Listed Buildings with provisions for change of use, extensions and alterations where such development will safeguard the character of the building and secure its upkeep.

Draft PPS 16 'Tourism' provides for various forms of tourist accommodation through the sympathetic conversion and re-use of existing buildings in the countryside.

Finally, the Addendum to PPS 7 'Residential Extensions and Alterations', seeks to promote high quality design in such proposals and to ensure that development respects the character of the local area. This policy applies to both urban and rural areas.

### **Lifetime Homes Standard**

**Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to encourage the concept of homes for life in terms of layout, design and access.

**(AQW 9757/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS 7) Quality Residential Environments and subsequent addendums, along with Creating Places sets out the current planning policy and supplementary planning guidance for the consideration and assessment of planning applications for residential development.

The application of space standards to all private housing as per the Lifetime Homes Standard is beyond the scope of current planning policy and is additional to that that required by Part R of the Northern Ireland Building Regulations.

Applying Lifetime Homes Standards is a fundamental change in approach to the provision of private housing and would require new planning policy and guidance. It would also necessitate a thorough economic analysis of the impact on the development industry.

The Department is supportive of and will encourage this concept where possible.



### **Landslide: Marlborough Terrace, Londonderry**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of the Environment why there has been disparity in terms of a co-ordinated response to the landslide incident in the Marlborough Terrace area of Londonderry in December 2011, and the response to a similar landslide in the Linen Fields development, Banbridge in January 2010.

**(AQW 9766/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** A landslip is a common factor in these two incidents, but the wider circumstances are different.

The Marlborough Terrace incident developed very suddenly, with the council having to react quickly to an emergency situation in order that public safety was restored. The Council also had to take steps to ensure the longer term safety of the area and to fund the works necessary to achieve both these objectives. The Department of the Environment's legislation enables it to provide supporting funding to councils in such an emergency situation. The funding was made against the condition that every attempt would be made to recover costs from private owners/insurers. Additionally, the departmental support funding was not to provide any betterment.

The situation at Linen Green is not an emergency situation as with Derry, has been on-going for some time and the local council has not been acting in relation to it.

### **Badger Baiting**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to combat badger baiting.

**(AQW 9781/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Badgers are listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 providing them with legal protection. The Department has made recent amendments to this legislation bringing in potential custodial sentences for certain offences including killing or injuring badgers. While it is the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) who undertake any wildlife crime investigations, wildlife experts within Northern Ireland Environment Agency provide scientific support and advice on request to the investigating team.

The Department also plays a key role in Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW NI). PAW membership comprises relevant Government Departments including the PSNI, Forest Service, DCAL, as well as representation from the local wildlife and animal welfare charities. The aim of PAW is to raise public awareness of wildlife crime, to publicize reporting mechanisms, to provide advice, information and expertise, and collect wildlife information.

The Department encourages anyone who sees what they suspect is badger baiting, or any other possible wildlife crime, to report the details to their nearest PSNI station 0845 600 8000 or by using the Crimestoppers number 0800 555 111.

### **Councils: Independent Advisers or Consultants**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether his Department will issue guidance to local councils advising them of best practice in relation to the employment of independent advisors or consultants under the Reform of Public Administration; and (ii) whether advisors or consultants will be granted full independence to report their findings.

**(AQW 9842/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:**

- (i) The employment of consultants by local councils, which are stand alone corporate public bodies, essentially involves tendering to buy in services. The matter is therefore governed by public procurement law, notably the Public Contract Regulations 2006 (as amended) and various EU procurement Directives. I shall raise with councils the requirements of best practice and procurement law in relation to this issue in the context of RPA. (ii) The terms of any consultancy awarded following a public procurement exercise would typically include a requirement to report findings to the public body based on their evidence gathering and assessments. It is to be hoped that independence will be at the heart of any work.

### **Quangos**

**Mr Weir** asked Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the quangos to which his Department makes appointments; (ii) how many members are appointed; and (iii) the remuneration paid to (a) the Chair; and (b) other members.

**(AQW 9896/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** As Minister of the Environment I have responsibility for appointing individuals to the following public bodies:

- The Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC);
- The Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland (LGSC);
- The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC);
- The Historic Buildings Council (HBC) and
- The Historic Monuments Council (HMC).

The number of members appointed to each of the bodies, as well as the names of the individuals appointed is detailed in the table below:

| <b>Public Body</b> | <b>Number of Members Appointed</b> | <b>Names of Individuals Appointed</b>  |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| NILGOSC            | 12                                 | Trevor Salmon<br>Julie Erskine<br>Joe Donaghy<br>Celine McCartan<br>Colin O'Hare<br>Bumper Graham<br>Linda Neilan<br>David Jackson<br>Ciaran Quigley<br>Peter Caldwell<br>Peter McMurray<br>Tom Irvine   |
| LGSC               | 7                                  | Mervyn Rankin<br>Ashley Boreland<br>Celine Connolly<br>William Francey MBE<br>Ald Nigel Hamilton<br>Ald Geraldine Rice MBE<br>Seamus Shields   |
| CNCC               | 14                                 | Patrick Casement<br>Peter Archdale<br>Dr Tony Bazley<br>Dr Richard Horton<br>Dr Hilary Kirkpatrick<br>Andrew Upton<br>Dr Alan Cooper<br>Shane Wolsey<br>Prof Sue Christie<br>John Witchell<br>Prof Julian Orford<br>Dr Jade Berman<br>Andrew Cunningham<br>Tony Traill |

| Public Body | Number of Members Appointed | Names of Individuals Appointed   |
|-------------|-----------------------------|--|
| HBC         | 18                          | Frank Robinson<br>Iona Andrews<br>Prof Joe Fitzgerald<br>Brian Green<br>Dr Paul Harron<br>Agnes Peacocke<br>Ursula O'Hare<br>Brian Banks<br>Kenneth Boston<br>Cathal Crimmins<br>Joe Diamond<br>Noelle Houston<br>Hannah Kenny<br>Alistair Lindsay<br>Robert Martin<br>Patrick McGuigan<br>Robert Miles<br>Dr Patricia Warke |
| HMC         | 15                          | Prof Gabriel Cooney<br>Henry Bell<br>Michael Conway<br>Tim Cunningham<br>Suzanne Lyle<br>Phillip Macdonald<br>John McGillan<br>Anne-Marie McStocker<br>Stephen Russell<br>Lesley Black<br>Kathleen Laverty<br>Sarah Witchell<br>Nick Brannon<br>Cormac Bourke<br>William Darby   |

Remuneration for the Chair and members of each of the body is detailed as follows:

- NILGOSC – Chair receives £12,000 per annum. Members receive a daily allowance not exceeding £113 plus expenses;
- LGSC – Chair receives £14,114 per annum. Members receive a daily allowance not exceeding £113 plus expenses;
- CNCC – Chair receives £9,740 per annum. Deputy Chair receives £6,525 per annum. Members receive expenses;
- HBC – Chair and members receive expenses; and
- HMC – Chair and members receive expenses.

## Papers for Assembly Committees

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail all occasions in the last 12 months when his Department has made a presentation to an Assembly committee and provided papers pertaining to that presentation to the committee less than 48 hours beforehand.

**(AQW 9929/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Since the start of the current Assembly mandate my Department has made presentations to the Environment Committee on thirty one separate occasions. All related papers, as agreed with Environment Committee staff, were provided at least 48hrs in advance.

Additionally, my Department has made one presentation to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. No supporting papers were provided for Committee members for this presentation.

## Planning Application: Sprucefield Centre Ltd

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Sprucefield Centre Limited planning application; and how many jobs the development is likely to create.

**(AQW 9937/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** This planning application was submitted to the Department on 26 October 2009. On 17 December 2009 the Department requested that the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) hold a public local inquiry to consider the application. However, the convening of the Inquiry has been delayed by a combination of judicial review proceedings and a need to consider further environmental information submitted by the applicant.

Further environmental information was submitted in August 2011 and again in February 2012. The details of the information have been advertised by the Department in accordance with statutory requirements and the information is presently under consideration by the Department. Once this stage of the process has been completed, the Department will be writing to the PAC to request a new date for the Inquiry.

With regard to job creation opportunities associated with the proposed development, the applicant estimates that up to 890 jobs will be created during the construction phase of the development with up to a further 1,616 jobs created when it is operational.

## Tourism: Cross-departmental Links

**Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the formal links which exist between his Department and other Departments in relation to tourism issues.

**(AQW 9938/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Department has a number of formal links with other departments in relation to tourism issues including:

- ongoing consultation with DETI, including the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) since the publication of draft PPS 16 – Tourism Development;
- consultation with the NITB on tourism related planning applications to ensure full consideration of development proposals citing a tourist need or other tourism related issue; and
- membership alongside NITB of the Historic Environment Strategic Ministerial Forum along with its Economic Sub Group and a Departmental Sub Group chaired by the Permanent Secretary.

The Department is also working with OFMDFM, DCAL and DETI (NITB) to promote NIEA's events, sites and properties. This activity will be mutually beneficial, in terms of the London 2012 Olympics and the NITB 2012 campaign 'Our Time Our Place'.

## Countryside Access: Council Staff

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of the Environment which councils have (i) staff whose sole responsibility is in relation to access to the countryside; and (ii) staff who are responsible for access to the countryside as part of their wider duties.

**(AQW 9940/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The information that has been provided by Councils is set out in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**

| Council       | Sole Duty | Wider Duties  |
|---------------|-----------|---|
| Antrim BC     |           | Countryside Recreation Officer  |
| Ards BC       |           | Project Officer   |
| Armagh C & DC |           | Leisure Facilities Manager  |
| Ballymena BC  |           | (1)Assistant Director Development, Leisure & Cultural Services.<br>(2)Countryside and Access Officer. |

| <b>Council</b>              | <b>Sole Duty</b>                        | <b>Wider Duties</b>   |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Ballymoney BC               | Access Officer (Part Time)              |   |
| Banbridge DC                | Countryside Officer                     |   |
| Belfast CC                  | Countryside Officer                     |   |
| Carrickfergus BC            |   | Parks & Countryside Officer   |
| Castlereagh BC              |   | Countryside Officer   |
| Coleraine BC                |   | Countryside & Marine Manager  |
| Cookstown DC                |   | Tourism Officer   |
| Craigavon BC                |   | Recreation Development Officer  |
| Derry CC                    | Access Officer                          |   |
| Down DC                     | Countryside Access Officer              | Also has Warden of Delamont Country Park & Tyrella who is responsible for delivering access to the country in respect of these two locations. |
| Dungannon & South Tyrone BC |   | Presently handled by Manager within Parks & Tourism. Council is restructuring and the function of an Access Officer will be addressed.        |
| Fermanagh DC                |   | Environment Officer   |
| Larne BC                    | Countryside Officer                     |   |
| Limavady BC                 | Countryside Services Officer            |   |
| Lisburn CC                  |   | Countryside Officer   |
| Magherafelt DC              |   | Head of Community Services  |
| Moyle DC                    | Countryside Officer                     |   |
| Newry & Mourne DC           | Rights of Way/Countryside Officer       |   |
| Newtownabbey BC             |   | Rural Project Officer   |
| North Down BC               | Countryside Recreation Officer          |   |
| Omagh DC                    | Sports Development & Recreation Officer |   |
| Strabane DC                 | Countryside Access Officer              |   |

### **Planning Permission: EQIAs**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the announcement by the Republic of Ireland's Minister Hogan that, following the European Court of Justice ruling C-125-06, he is introducing legislation that will no longer allow developers to apply for retention planning permission when an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required under the Environmental Assessment Directive 85/337/EEC, for his assessment of the implications that the judgement will have on the many retrospective applications for EIA development currently in the planning system.

**(AQW 9965/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Part 7 of the the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 provide for the consideration of EIA for development which is the subject of a planning enforcement notice. Where such development requires EIA, it is referred to as unauthorised EIA development. A failure to enforce where a development is unauthorised EIA development would be in breach of the Directive.

In *Ardagh Glass v Chester City Council*, the High Court held, on 8 April 2009, that retrospective planning permission could lawfully be granted for EIA development as long as the competent authorities paid careful regard to the need to protect the objectives of the EIA Directive.

This was upheld by the Court of Appeal on 29 January 2010 for three reasons -

- i) Common sense - It would not make sense to require all unlawful EIA development to be removed. At one extreme, development causing serious environmental damage with flagrant disrespect for the Directive should be the subject of removal. However, at the other extreme, there might have been an inadvertent failure to comply with the Directive, and the development may not be causing environmental harm and may actually be enhancing the environment. In such circumstances the Court of Appeal held that it would be an affront to common sense to require its removal.
- ii) Disproportionate - It is a fundamental principle of European Community law that any measures taken are proportionate. A prohibition on the grant of retrospective permission for EIA development, regardless of the circumstances and the environmental consequences thereof, would be wholly disproportionate.
- iii) The Ireland case - The Court of Appeal accepted passages from the Court of Justice of the European Union case (ECJ) in Commission v Ireland (a case relied upon by both sides in the High Court) to the effect that, subject to certain conditions, there may be exceptional circumstances in which a retrospective permission may be granted for EIA development.

Having considered both the Ireland case and the Ardagh Glass Ltd ruling, I am content that the acceptance of retrospective applications is not in itself a breach of the EIA Directive and that there are no implications for cases to arise from past decisions as a result of the acceptance of such applications.

### **Alcohol: Public Service Vehicles**

**Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to his plans to curb illegal drinking, whether he will consider provisions to allow newly married couples to enjoy a wedding toast whilst travelling in vehicles operated by private hire companies and coach operators.

**(AQW 9998/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Currently regulation 51(1)(k) of the Public Service Vehicles Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1985 prohibits passengers on public service vehicles (PSVs) from consuming alcohol.

The department is currently undertaking a wide ranging review of arrangements for licensing bus operators with a view to developing a fair and proportionate regulatory regime. Extensive public consultation has been undertaken and the issue of alcohol being carried in public service vehicles as well as the issue of wedding toasts have been raised and are being considered.

In parallel with this review, officials from the Department are working with PSNI and the bus industry to agree shorter-term appropriate changes to the current legislative and enforcement regimes to tackle irresponsible drinking on public service vehicles. This process will take full account of the safety of passengers.

I acknowledge the proposal outlined by the Member, would have sympathy with the sentiment, but have to ensure that mixed messages are not conveyed by me and the department about alcohol consumption in a vehicle.

### **Hydroelectric Scheme: River Camowen**

**Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any environmental concerns in relation to the recently installed hydroelectric scheme on the River Camowen, Omagh, by Omagh District Council.[R]

**(AQW 10002/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Omagh District Council's hydroelectric scheme on the Camowen River was issued with an Abstraction and Impoundment Licence by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) on 23 June 2011 under the Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006. The licence specifies the maximum amount of water the turbine can take and also the amount of water that must remain in the river when the turbine is operating.

In determining this licence, NIEA consulted both internally in relation to Natural Heritage, Built Heritage, and hydrology and externally with the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure, DARD Rivers Agency, the Lough's Agency, the Ulster Angling Federation and the Foyle Association of Salmon and Trout Anglers.

An assessment under The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 [as amended], conducted by NIEA to meet the requirements of the Habitats Directive, found that the scheme, as proposed, would have no likely significant effects on the environment.

A hydrology assessment indicated that, with the application of appropriate water resource standards in the licence, this activity would be unlikely to impact upon the hydrological status of the water body in which it operates.

As a result NIEA determined that there were no significant environmental concerns so long as the conditions of the licence are adhered to.

On 16 March 2012, NIEA was made aware of a potential breach of the licence conditions. In relation to this incident, a Stop Notice was issued to Omagh District Council by NIEA on 21 March 2012 under the Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006.

Omagh District Council has 28 days to formally respond. In the interim, NIEA will be gathering further evidence as part of the investigation in accordance with its Enforcement Policy into this incident and it would not be appropriate to comment further at this time.

## Planning Service: Council Meetings

**Mr F McCann** asked the Minister of the Environment whether arrangements for Planning Service meetings are standard across all 26 council areas.

**(AQO 1633/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Arrangements for consultation with Councils are standard across the 26 Council areas in that Council meetings are held on a monthly basis with the exception of Belfast city Council which meets every 2 weeks.

The Department has established consultation arrangements designed to ensure that elected representatives have an important input to the decision-making process. Guidance on this agreed process has been made available to all DOE Planning staff and Councils which helps to ensure greater consistency and more meaningful consultation with councils.

If a Council opposes the Department's opinion on a planning application it can seek a deferral at a council meeting. Where an application is deferred, an office meeting, or exceptionally a site meeting, will be arranged to discuss the issues.

While it is important that Councils provide planning reasons for seeking a deferral in line with the Departments established guidelines, the Department will apply a flexible interpretation of the agreed criteria, where appropriate, to ensure that Councils continue to have a full and meaningful role in the development management process.

## Belfast Hills: Access

**Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department has taken to ensure that residents of the Greater Shankill area have access to the Belfast Hills.

**(AQW 10142/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The DOE supports district councils in developing and promoting access to the countryside. The Department also currently funds the Belfast Hills Partnership. The City Council has been working with the Belfast Hills Partnership to negotiate with a local landowner to allow for access from the greater Shankill area to the Belfast Hills. It has not proved possible for them to reach agreement with the landowner to date. The Department would consider a grant application to contribute to developing an access route in this area once landowner agreements are in place. I am however looking to help in other ways in the short and medium terms.

## CPR: Staff Training

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of the Environment what strategy is in place to train departmental staff in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

**(AQW 10155/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Under the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations (NI) 1982 the Department must provide adequate first aid cover for all its employees. There are currently 326 staff trained to administer first aid to the whole Department including those staff who work outside or whose duties require them to travel frequently across Northern Ireland.

Managers within the Department carry out assessments to determine the level of first aid cover required within their business area and practitioners are then sought to provide that cover.

Two levels of training are provided - 'Emergency First Aid' which lasts one day and 'First Aid at Work' which lasts three days. The more advanced course is approved by the Health and Safety Executive and on successful completion, staff are issued with an accredited certificate of competence which is valid for 3 years. Refresher training is provided once the certificate expires.

We have 249 accredited staff, but both levels of training referred to above cover Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation and on completion of these courses, practitioners are competent in administering this procedure.

## Planning Policy Statement 21: Supplementary Planning Guidance

**Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of the Environment to give an overview of the responses to the consultation on PPS21 draft Supplementary Planning Guidance.

**(AQO 1626/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** 'Building on Tradition' a draft sustainable rural design guide for the Countryside was published for 3 months public consultation ending on 8 July 2011. There was a good response to the public consultation exercise with the Department receiving a total of 28 responses from a broad range of interests.

Overall, the draft guidance has been positively received, with around two-thirds of respondents expressing broad support for its contents. Many respondents made suggestions however on how particular aspects of the draft guidance could be improved upon. In the main, the comments received related to relatively minor points concerning for example, terminology and the use of language, as opposed to fundamental concern with the overall approach,

I have recently agreed amendments to the Design Guide which has been refined and improved. Subject to Executive endorsement, it is my intention that the design guide is published in final form before the summer recess.

## Marine Bill: Marine Management Organisation

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the possible inclusion of a Marine Management Organisation provision in the Marine Bill.

**(AQO 1627/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I intend to continue my conversations with the Executive as the Marine Bill is making its passage through the Assembly. I hope that it will ultimately include provisions on a Marine Management Organisation.

I believe strongly that a Marine Management Organisation is a necessary managerial model going forward. It is the best vehicle by which to manage and reconcile the many interests and needs of the marine environment.

## Planning Policy Statement 21: Farm Dwellings

**Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline any plans he has to relax PPS21 to allow more suitable placement of dwellings on farms, given the difficulties in relation to clustering new dwellings with existing farm buildings.

**(AQO 1628/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Members will be aware that in June last year I launched a review of how PPS21 was operating in practice.

I will shortly complete this review with the intention of ensuring consistency of application of the PPS and appropriate flexibility on its operation in line with its content and substance.

I intend to make a statement to the Assembly in that regard as soon as practicable.

## Antrim, Ballymena, Larne Area Plan 2016

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Antrim, Ballymena and Larne Area Plan 2016.[R]

**(AQO 1629/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** Work on the draft Antrim Ballymena Larne Area Plan 2016 ceased during 2008. This was due to implications arising from a High Court decision relating to the transposition of European Directive 2001/42/EC on Strategic Environmental Assessment into Northern Ireland law. When the Department subsequently appealed this judgement the NI Court of Appeal decided to seek a preliminary ruling from the European Court of Justice. The ruling in October 2011 broadly found in favour of the Department's position. The Department is now awaiting the final ruling of Court of Appeal. If the outcome is as is anticipated, then the Department will need to review its overall Development Plan Programme considering the competing demands arising from the current plan coverage and resource implications before committing to and commencing any new development plan work.

## Cyclists: Road Safety

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of the Environment what additional resources his Department will allocate to improving road safety for cyclists.

**(AQO 1630/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The DOE has a statutory duty to promote road safety. One of the ways it raises awareness of road safety issues is through the Department's road safety advertising campaigns.

Cyclists are particularly vulnerable and as such the Department has recently allocated resources to increase awareness amongst all road users, including drivers, of the risks cyclists face on the road.

In October 2011 the Department launched the 'Be Cycle Aware' campaign, employing radio and bus rear advertising, in order to remind drivers and cyclists alike to pay attention when sharing the road.

A radio advert targets drivers as they travel in the car during daytime hours when they would be expected to share the road with cyclists.

A second radio advert and bus rear advertising targets cyclists, reminding them of their vulnerability and the need to pay attention and stay safe on the roads.

This activity is in line with Action Measure 124 of the Road Safety Strategy 2020 - "We will give consideration to measures that improve the safety of cyclists; including what cyclists can do to keep themselves safe and what other road users can do".

Currently all road users are provided with detailed guidance through the current edition of the Highway Code which contains rules, information and advice that helps prepare them for the demands of today's roads. Advice on how drivers should treat vulnerable road users, including cyclists, with extra care and attention is covered specifically by Rules 204 to 218 of the Code. Advice for cyclists can be found under Rules 59-82.

Resources have been directed towards the 'Be Cycle Aware' campaign so that it will be added to the monthly road safety intervention radio activity throughout the coming year.

All of this is in addition to the Department's Cycle Proficiency Scheme (CPS) which is delivered to approximately 580 primary schools with an average of 8,800 – 9,000 children trained each year at a cost of around £84,000 per annum.



## Review of Public Administration: Resources

**Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with NILGA about resources to implement the changes resulting from the Review of Public Administration.

**(AQO 1631/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** I am meeting NILGA on 27 March 2012 to discuss a number of business issues relating to the reform of local government that will include resources for the Association over the next three years.

I have also informed Council representatives, including NILGA, of the Executive's decision that the implementation of the reform programme will not be financially assisted by central government. In doing so, I have confirmed that I agree with this approach and that collectively we need to look at other funding opportunities, including early savings from the sector's Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency programme, as well as the use of reserves and loans.

I wish to assure you of my commitment to working closely with the local government sector in identifying practical models to finance the programme.

## Built and Natural Heritage: Economic Development

**Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline how built and natural heritage assets can be leveraged, including relevant enforcement activity, to contribute to general economic development.

**(AQO 1632/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Built and Natural Heritage constitutes an important resource which already makes a significant contribution to the Northern Ireland economy. A report quantifying impact in regard to the Built Heritage has been commissioned by the Historic Environment Strategic Forum which I chair, and this will be published later this year.

Areas to which the sector makes a significant contribution include:

- Stimulating Tourism. All of the 'Signature Projects' currently being promoted by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board have a strong built and natural heritage element. NITB research has shown that both built and natural heritage are a major draw-particularly for visitors from outside the region.
- Added Value to regeneration schemes. Historic buildings and monuments and natural heritage features provide great character to a place. Such character can have a positive impact upon rents, and also upon the reputation of businesses or agencies located in them.
- Attracting business. Inward investment is increasingly mobile. The historic and natural environments help to distinguish Northern Ireland from elsewhere. This can contribute to attracting business to the region.
- Direct contribution to economy. Significant funds are invested in the historic environment every year in Northern Ireland. This sustains jobs, skills and knowledge. For example, NIEA's listed building grant scheme, leverages an average investment of £7.65 for every £1 of grant-aid provided for the repair and maintenance of historic fabric. This is an important contribution to sustaining the building industry.

Realising and leveraging this potential requires action across a range of fronts:

- Government can lead by example and ensure that the Monuments in State Care and Country Parks - which it owns - are well interpreted and are able to realise their full potential as a tourism draw.
- Government can continue to work strategically with key partners to ensure tourism potential is realised for initiatives such as the Signature Projects, the Irish Open Golf Tournament; and the City of Culture in Derry/Londonderry.
- DOE can highlight the potential of the historic and natural environment to others, through its publications, events, and website.
- Owners can ensure that the historic buildings they own are kept to a good standard and, as a result, contribute – positively - to the character of their surroundings. DOE can encourage this through grant-aid for repairs to listed buildings, and in the worst cases, help deter deterioration and neglect through actions such as the issue of Urgent Work's notices.
- DOE can help stimulate the construction sector, through ensuring that its grant-aid schemes are well targeted.
- The Department will investigate all alleged breaches of planning control. However, when determining what (if any) action is to be taken, the Department has a general discretion on whether to take enforcement action against a breach of planning control. It does so when it considers it expedient, having regard to the provisions of the development plan and any other material consideration.
- Priority will be given to those breaches where, in the Department's opinion, the greatest harm is being caused. Where the extent of the breach is considered, by the Department, to be minor in nature and the impact on the environment minimal, the Department may consider that it is not expedient to take formal enforcement action. This consideration must be made on a case by case basis.
- In terms of enforcement, all breaches are categorised on the Planning Portal with a Breach Type value of Works to Listed Building.

## Planning Process: Renewable Energy

**Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he would consider speeding up the planning process for renewable energy applications.

**(AQO 1634/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Department welcomes the contribution that renewables make to the drive to reduce carbon emissions and acknowledges the importance of processing these types of applications in a timely manner.

A number of short term reform measures have been initiated to improve performance and speed in decision making and to stimulate and support economic recovery in the region. A range of measures are currently in place which is intended to improve the speed of decision making for renewable energy project applications.

A Sub Group of the Planning Forum is considering development proposals for renewable energy development in the context of planning applications, licensing requirements and resources and structures for dealing with such proposals.

Planning staff are actively engaging with consultees to the planning process to ensure that any relevant information required in respect of renewable energy is submitted at the beginning of the process and consultation is focused and timely.

The specialist teams in Planning Headquarters who deal exclusively with specific types of renewable energy applications ensure that a consistent approach is taken. Specific training to planning staff on the assessment of planning applications for single wind turbines has just been completed and this will ensure consistency throughout Area Planning Offices.

In preparation for the transfer of planning functions to Local Councils, the Department will be fundamentally reviewing the system for measuring planning application processing targets.

## North/South Electricity Interconnector: Planning Application

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the planning application for a North-South electricity interconnector, following the recent public inquiry.

**(AQW 10273/11-15)**

**Mr Attwood:** The Department asked the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to conduct a public inquiry for the purpose of considering representations made in respect of this major planning application. The inquiry opened on 6 March 2012 but was adjourned on 20 March 2012. The PAC recommended that the ES and addendum should be readvertised, and that the environmental statement is consolidated and updated to take account of changes put forward by the applicants in their evidence to the inquiry. The PAC proposes to take no further action in relation to the inquiry until the application and environmental statement have been readvertised and the PAC has been so advised.

Prior to the inquiry being adjourned, on 16 March 2012 objectors to the planning application applied for a judicial review of decisions taken by the Planning Appeals Commission and by the Department of the Environment. This application is currently on hold.

## Department of Finance and Personnel

### Civil or Public Servants' Salaries

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether any civil or public servants, including staff in arm's-length bodies, salaries are paid through private companies.

**(AQW 8394/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):** All NICS departments have confirmed that they are not aware of any civil or public servants in departments or arm's-length bodies whose salaries are paid into private companies. It should be noted that staff have the facility to alter their own bank account details through the online HR facility, although no salaries are paid outside the PAYE system.

### Wind Energy Production: Jobs

**Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many jobs have been created as a result of wind energy production over the past five years.

**(AQW 9601/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The UK Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 2007 used in surveys that provide estimates of employee jobs classifies businesses by the type of economic activity in which they are engaged. Wind energy production is grouped with similar businesses and therefore it is not possible to determine how many employee jobs there are in this industry alone.

### Civil or Public Servants' Salaries

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) how many civil or public servants', including staff in arm's-length bodies, salaries are currently paid through private companies and not through the PAYE arrangements, broken down by (a) Department; (b) arm's-length body; and (c) grade; and (ii) how many civil or public servants', including staff in arm's-length bodies,

salaries have been paid through private companies and not through the PAYE arrangements in each of the last five years, broken down by (a) Department; (b) arm's-length body; and (c) grade.

**(AQW 9668/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** All Northern Ireland Civil Service departments have confirmed that they have no staff, and that their arm's length bodies have no staff, whose salaries have been paid through private companies and not through the PAYE arrangements in any of the last five years, with the exception of OFMDFM. One of OFMDFM's arm's length bodies, the Strategic Investment Board (SIB), previously had 4 staff members who were employed on fixed term contracts and were paid through their own companies. As at 31 March 2011, SIB no longer had any staff being paid in this way and will not employ people on this basis in the future. For ease of reference I have detailed this information in the table overleaf.

|                                |                    | 2007/<br>2008 | 2008/<br>2009 | 2009/<br>2010 | 2010/<br>2011 | 2011/<br>2012 |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| (a) Departmental Staff         |                    | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0             |
| (b) Strategic Investment Board | Grade 6 equivalent | 4             | 3             | 2             | 1             | 0             |
| <b>Total</b>                   |                    | <b>4</b>      | <b>3</b>      | <b>2</b>      | <b>1</b>      | <b>0</b>      |

## Employment

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 8540/11-15, why his Department can only provide estimates of the percentage and number of people of working age who are employed in each district council area; and (ii) what plans he has to provide accurate figures on employment statistics broken down by council area.

**(AQW 9759/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a voluntary sample survey carried out by interviewing individuals in private households and is the most comprehensive source of information on their circumstances and work. It is the largest regular household survey in Northern Ireland, providing a rich source of information on the labour force using internationally agreed concepts and definitions.

There is no legislative basis for carrying out a census of households on a monthly basis in order to provide accurate employment information and the cost in terms of finance and staff resource would outweigh any benefits that would accrue. Survey estimates, such as the Labour Force Survey, provide valuable information in regular timely intervals, at much less cost than a complete census and through a relatively less resource intensive process.

Accurate figures for employment will however be available from the Census of Population. The most recent Census of the population in Northern Ireland took place on Sunday 27 March 2011. Data from the Census will provide important information on the population and nature of Northern Ireland as well as small areas and population groups.

## Public Sector Tenders: Under-pricing

**Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what processes and procedures are in place to prevent companies from under-pricing public sector tenders in order to secure work.

**(AQW 9820/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Where the tender is assessed as being abnormally low the Contracting Authority, before rejecting the tender, will seek an explanation from the tenderer as to how the contract can be delivered for the offer price.

The Contracting Authority may ask for details of the proposed methodology or technical solution proposed and any exceptionally favourable factors which the tenderer is reliant upon.

The evidence provided by the tenderer will be taken into account and the tender either accepted, where appropriate justification has been provided, or rejected, where the offer has been verified with the tenderer as being abnormally low.

Providing the tenderer is able to provide assurance that the contract can be satisfactorily met, the submission of a low price in order to secure work would not normally constitute grounds for rejection of the tender.

## North/South Bodies: 2012 Business Plans

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the 2012 business cases for the North-South bodies were approved; and how many have been approved to date.

**(AQW 9825/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** I am making the assumption that you are referring to the Business Plans for each of the North South Bodies.

To date, the NSMC has approved one North South Body 2012 Business Plan. Tourism Ireland's 2012 Business Plan was approved on 1st March 2012.

### Properties: Vacant in Larne

**Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of vacant non-domestic properties in Larne town centre.

**(AQW 9828/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Information on the number of vacant non-domestic properties in Larne Town Centre is not available as information is collated by Land & Property Services at District Council and Ward levels only. The number of vacant non-domestic properties in each Ward in the Larne Borough Council area as at 18th March 2012 is given in the table overleaf.

| Ward/Council                 | Number of Vacant Non-Domestic Properties |
|------------------------------|--|
| Antiville                    | *  |
| Ballycarry                   | 8  |
| Ballyloran                   | *  |
| Blackcave                    | *  |
| Carncastle                   | *  |
| Carnlough                    | 18                                       |
| Central                      | 119                                      |
| Craigyhill                   | *  |
| Gardenmore                   | 6  |
| Glenarm                      | 20                                       |
| Glynn                        | 11                                       |
| Harbour                      | 28                                       |
| Islandmagee                  | *  |
| Kilwaughter                  | 22                                       |
| Townparks                    | 14                                       |
| Ward Area not known          | *  |
| <b>Larne Borough Council</b> | <b>259</b>                               |

\* 5 properties or less

### Hamill/Brennan v DFP Tribunal

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the Hamill/Brennan versus DFP Tribunal (i) whether the complaint was withdrawn by the claimants or a settlement was reached; (ii) whether his Department conceded in order for the case to be withdrawn or settled; (iii) for how many days the case ran before being withdrawn or settled; and (iv) to provide an estimate of the cost of the tribunal and who will bear the costs.

**(AQW 9847/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The cases were withdrawn by the claimants. This was without settlement or concession. The Industrial Tribunal sat for four days.

In accordance with normal procedures in the Industrial Tribunal each side met its own costs. DFP's legal costs amounted to £68,260. The Department has no record of the claimants' costs.

### Special Advisers: Pay Increase

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 1711/11-15, to detail (i) whether the First Minister and deputy First Minister were consulted about the increase; and (ii) whether other Ministers were consulted.

**(AQW 9919/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** I took the decision in my role as Minister with responsibility for civil service pay to set the upper limit of the pay band B for Special Advisers at £90,000.

### Income Tax Personal Allowance: Reduction

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the number of pensioners that will be impacted by the reduction in Income Tax Personal Allowance.

**(AQW 9942/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** HMRC have published a summary of impacts of the reduction in the Income Tax Personal Allowance which states that in 2013-14, 4.41 million people aged 65 and over will be worse off compared to 2012-13 when RPI indexation to the age-related allowances is taken into account.

### Corporation Tax: Devolution of Powers

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the potential impact of the cost of devolving corporation tax, following the Chancellor's announcement of a reduction in corporation tax.

**(AQW 9943/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Full revised estimates of the impact of the Chancellor's announcement in the budget of a further percentage point reduction in the UK's main rate of corporation tax on the cost of devolving these powers to Northern Ireland have not yet been produced. This will be done as part of the work of Joint Ministerial Working Group on Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy which has a specific workstream on costs.

Broadly speaking, the lower rate for the UK has a first downward effect as the difference between the UK rate and any reduced rate for Northern Ireland will be smaller. However, alongside the budget, the Office of Budget Responsibility published revised increased (since their last estimate in November) estimates of future UK Corporation Tax receipts. Together these changes will impact on the other elements of the cost estimates such as profit shifting, tax motivated incorporation and the revenues from other taxes such as income tax and national insurance.

The Joint Ministerial Working Group aims to report during the summer and a decision will be taken by the Government on whether it will agree to the devolution of these powers following this. No updated cost estimates will be available until the final report of the Working Group.

### Tax: Reduction in Top Rate

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the number of people in Northern Ireland that will be affected by the reduction in the top rate of tax from 50 percent to 45 percent.

**(AQW 9944/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** There are currently no estimates of the number of people in Northern Ireland affected by the reduction in the top rate of tax from 50 per cent to 45 per cent. However as part of Budget 2012, HMRC published a paper on 'The Exchequer effect of the 50 per cent additional rate of income.' This paper was used to inform the Exchequer estimates for the Budget 2012 measure to reduce the top rate of tax and gives further information on the reasons behind the reduction.

### Suicide: Upward Trend

**Mr S Anderson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 9335/11-15, what analysis he has carried out on the upward trend in suicide among the (i) under 25; and (ii) over 45 age groups.

**(AQW 9945/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The number of deaths registered and the death rate due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'<sup>1</sup> or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'<sup>2</sup> has more than doubled between 2003 and 2010 – Table 1.

**Table 1: Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'<sup>1</sup> or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted' and rate per 1,000 population, 2003-2010.**

| Registration Year | Number of Suicides | Rate per 1,000 Population |
|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 2003              | 144                | 0.08                      |
| 2004              | 146                | 0.09                      |
| 2005              | 213                | 0.12                      |
| 2006              | 291                | 0.17                      |
| 2007              | 242                | 0.14                      |
| 2008              | 282                | 0.16                      |
| 2009              | 260                | 0.15                      |
| 2010              | 313                | 0.17                      |

On average there are around 3 male suicides for every female suicide - Table 2.

**Table 2: Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'<sup>1</sup> or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted' by sex, 2003-2010.**

| Registration Year | Numbers      |            | Percentages |            |
|-------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|------------|
|                   | Male         | Female     | Male        | Female     |
| 2003              | 112          | 32         | 78%         | 22%        |
| 2004              | 105          | 41         | 72%         | 28%        |
| 2005              | 167          | 46         | 78%         | 22%        |
| 2006              | 227          | 64         | 78%         | 22%        |
| 2007              | 175          | 67         | 72%         | 28%        |
| 2008              | 218          | 64         | 77%         | 23%        |
| 2009              | 205          | 55         | 79%         | 21%        |
| 2010              | 240          | 73         | 77%         | 23%        |
| <b>Average</b>    | <b>1,449</b> | <b>442</b> | <b>77%</b>  | <b>23%</b> |

Over the last eight years the number of suicides registered has increased across all age-groups. However the proportion of suicides by age group has not changed markedly – Table 3.

**Table 3: Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'<sup>1</sup> or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'<sup>2</sup> by age-group, 2003-2010 – numbers and percentages**

| Age Group       | Registration Year - Numbers |            |            |            |            |            |            |            | Average    |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
|                 | 2003                        | 2004       | 2005       | 2006       | 2007       | 2008       | 2009       | 2010       |            |
| Under 25        | 24                          | 24         | 35         | 60         | 41         | 48         | 42         | 71         | 43         |
| 25-34           | 33                          | 28         | 44         | 55         | 43         | 60         | 59         | 57         | 47         |
| 35-44           | 35                          | 33         | 45         | 69         | 52         | 75         | 63         | 65         | 55         |
| 45+             | 52                          | 61         | 89         | 107        | 106        | 99         | 96         | 120        | 91         |
| <b>All ages</b> | <b>144</b>                  | <b>146</b> | <b>213</b> | <b>291</b> | <b>242</b> | <b>282</b> | <b>260</b> | <b>313</b> | <b>236</b> |

| Age Group       | Registration Year - Percentages |             |             |             |             |             |             |             | Average     |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                 | 2003                            | 2004        | 2005        | 2006        | 2007        | 2008        | 2009        | 2010        |             |
| Under 25        | 17%                             | 16%         | 16%         | 21%         | 17%         | 17%         | 16%         | 23%         | 18%         |
| 25-34           | 23%                             | 19%         | 21%         | 19%         | 18%         | 21%         | 23%         | 18%         | 20%         |
| 35-44           | 24%                             | 23%         | 21%         | 24%         | 21%         | 27%         | 24%         | 21%         | 23%         |
| 45+             | 36%                             | 42%         | 42%         | 37%         | 44%         | 35%         | 37%         | 38%         | 39%         |
| <b>All ages</b> | <b>100%</b>                     | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Suicide varies by area. Generally the more deprived an area the more suicides there are to people living there. Over the last eight years 10% of suicides were to people living in the 20% least deprived areas. Three times more suicides (32%) were to people living in the 20% most deprived areas. In addition whilst the numbers have increased, the distribution across deprived areas has not changed over the last eight years – Table 4.

**Table 4: Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'<sup>1</sup> or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'<sup>2</sup> by Deprivation Quintile, 2003-2010 – numbers and percentages**

| Registration Year | Deprivation Quintile             |            |            |            |                                 |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|---------------------------------|
|                   | Band 1: 20% Least Deprived Areas | Band 2     | Band 3     | Band 4     | Band 5: 20% Most Deprived Areas |
| 2003              | 15                               | 30         | 34         | 23         | 42                              |
| 2004              | 13                               | 22         | 27         | 37         | 47                              |
| 2005              | 27                               | 39         | 36         | 60         | 51                              |
| 2006              | 29                               | 50         | 51         | 63         | 97                              |
| 2007              | 22                               | 34         | 38         | 65         | 83                              |
| 2008              | 31                               | 40         | 47         | 67         | 97                              |
| 2009              | 18                               | 37         | 53         | 64         | 87                              |
| 2010              | 39                               | 52         | 56         | 57         | 109                             |
| <b>Average</b>    | <b>194</b>                       | <b>304</b> | <b>342</b> | <b>436</b> | <b>613</b>                      |

| Registration Year | Percentages                      |            |            |            |                                 |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|---------------------------------|
|                   | Band 1: 20% Least Deprived Areas | Band 2     | Band 3     | Band 4     | Band 5: 20% Most Deprived Areas |
| 2003              | 10%                              | 21%        | 24%        | 16%        | 29%                             |
| 2004              | 9%                               | 15%        | 18%        | 25%        | 32%                             |
| 2005              | 13%                              | 18%        | 17%        | 28%        | 24%                             |
| 2006              | 10%                              | 17%        | 18%        | 22%        | 33%                             |
| 2007              | 9%                               | 14%        | 16%        | 27%        | 34%                             |
| 2008              | 11%                              | 14%        | 17%        | 24%        | 34%                             |
| 2009              | 7%                               | 14%        | 20%        | 25%        | 34%                             |
| 2010              | 12%                              | 17%        | 18%        | 18%        | 35%                             |
| <b>Average</b>    | <b>10%</b>                       | <b>16%</b> | <b>18%</b> | <b>23%</b> | <b>32%</b>                      |

1 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes X60-X84, Y87.0

2 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes Y10-Y34, Y87.2

### **CPR: Staff Training**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what strategy is in place to train departmental staff in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

**(AQW 9970/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** There is no statutory requirement for employers to train their staff in CPR techniques. There is however a statutory requirement to comply with first aid at work regulations – The Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1982. Employers have a legal duty to make arrangements to ensure their employees receive immediate attention if they are injured or become ill at work.

In compliance with those regulations, DFP has a network of first aiders across the various departmental sites. All these staff are trained in CPR as part of their first aider training.

## Quangos

**Mr Weir** asked Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the quangos to which his Department makes appointments; (ii) how many members are appointed; and (iii) the remuneration paid to (a) the Chair; and (b) other members.

**(AQW 9990/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Information about public appointments made by my Department to the Northern Ireland Building Regulations Advisory Committee, the Statistics Advisory Committee, the NI Authority for Utility Regulation and the Lay Observer for NI is set out in the Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report, published by OFMDFM. The most recent report covers the period 2010/11 and is available from the OFMDFM website or from the Assembly Library's reference collection (Reference number R351.41609 NOR).

There are a further two bodies for which my Department makes appointments, the Public Service Commission and the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (NI) Governance Group. The number of members appointed to each body and the remuneration paid is listed in the table below.

| Bodies for which DFP make appointments                       | Number of members and remuneration |   |         |               |
|--|------------------------------------|---|---------|---------------|
|  | Chair                              | £   | Members | £             |
| NI Building Regulations Advisory Committee                   | 1                                  | Expenses only   | 17      | Expenses only |
| Statistics Advisory Committee                                | 1                                  | Expenses only   | 7       | Expenses only |
| NI Authority for Utility Regulation                          | 1                                  | 33,996  | 9       | 9,521 each    |
| Lay Observer   | 1                                  | Fee basis depending on no. days worked & cases reviewed | -       | -             |
| Public Service Commission for NI                             | 1                                  | 15,000  | 6       | 10,800 total  |
| Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (NI) Governance Group | 1                                  | Fee basis depending on no. of days                      | 6       | Unpaid        |

## Special Adviser: Ministerial Meetings

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 2596/11-15, whether the information requested is available and can be provided only for the period from the date of appointment of his current Special Adviser to 27 September 2012.

**(AQW 10010/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The information requested is not readily available and can only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

## Small Business Rate Relief Scheme: Multiple Premises

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many businesses in each council area, with more than three premises at the same address, will not qualify for the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme from 1 April 2012 but would have qualified if the premises housed separate businesses.

**(AQW 10050/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Land & Property Services (LPS) is currently preparing to issue rate demands for the 2012/2013 rating year. In line with the Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012, LPS has taken steps to exclude businesses who occupy more than three premises (multiples) from entitlement to Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR).

Provision has been made, reflecting concerns raised during consultation, to deal with cases where a number of low value properties are situated together in one location. The Regulations provide that where each property within a group of properties is contiguous (generally adjoining) with another property in the group, the properties in the group have a combined Net Annual Value (NAV) not exceeding £10,000 and are occupied by the same person, the properties can still be treated as a single property for the purpose of the multiples exclusion. This is in line with the upper threshold for the scheme.

It has not been possible, in the time available and based solely on existing data, to determine exactly which of the properties excluded by LPS might be multiple units at the same location. It is anticipated that the numbers affected are very small.

Where LPS is made aware that the multiple properties are adjoining properties (contiguous) and the above criteria are met, LPS will amend the ratepayer's account to ensure that the relevant properties benefit from SBRR.

## Apartment Management Companies: Reform

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 5197/11, what progress has been made on the reform of apartment development management companies.

**(AQW 10055/11-15)**



**Mr Wilson:** I indicated in response to AQW 5081/11-15 that the Northern Ireland Law Commission had agreed to issue its consultation paper on multi-unit developments in June of this year.

My officials are in ongoing contact with the Commission and the stated timescale still stands.

### Council Tax Relief: Service Personnel

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the Council Tax Relief in the rest of the UK for service personnel serving abroad, whether he intends to introduce similar provisions.

**(AQW 10110/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 10011/11-15 on 30 March 2012.

### Public Sector: Regional Pay

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the Budget Statement, what discussions he intends to have with Treasury about regional pay for the public sector.

**(AQW 10125/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** I have already raised a number of serious concerns about any plans to move towards regional public sector pay rates, as did the Scottish and Welsh Finance Ministers, when we met with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Danny Alexander MP, prior to the Budget in March. I am very concerned the introduction of such a measure and any related block adjustment would have damaging implications for our local economic recovery. I also made it clear that I do not accept that national pay agreements harm the private sector in terms of staff recruitment or retention.

The Chancellor has asked the independent Pay Review Bodies to look at this issue and report their findings by July 2012. We have been advised that this work is at a very early stage and that there will be negotiations with each of the Devolved Administrations before a final decision is taken.

I can assure you that I will oppose any changes that I believe would harm Northern Ireland's economic recovery and I am sure that my Scottish and Welsh counterparts as well as representatives from a number of English regions will be doing the same.

### Civil or Public Servants' Salaries

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the delay in answering AQW 8394/11-15 and AQW 9668/11-15, whether he can confirm that the delay is not due to the existence of individuals being paid through limited companies in the last five years.

**(AQW 10130/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** I can confirm that the delay in answering AQW 8394/11-15 and AQW 9668/11-15 is not due to the existence of individuals being paid through limited companies in the last five years.

### Unemployment: North and West Belfast

**Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many young people in (i) North; and (ii) West Belfast are currently unemployed; and what these figures represent as a percentage of the unemployed people in each constituency.

**(AQW 10137/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The official measure of unemployment is sourced from the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, as a sample survey the LFS is not designed to provide unemployment for young people at parliamentary Constituency Area.

The following table is sourced to the claimant count measure of unemployment. This shows the number of young people (under 24) claiming unemployment related benefits in Belfast North and Belfast West at February 2012 and these figures as a percentage of the total claimant in each constituency.

| Parliamentary Constituency Area | Number Of Youth Claimants | Total Claimants in that Area | Percentage of Total Claimant |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Belfast North                   | 1,515                     | 5,235                        | 28.9                         |
| Belfast West                    | 1,660                     | 5,220                        | 31.8                         |

Data rounded to 5.

Figures do not include clerical claimants which make up less than 1% of total.

Percentage of total claimants is calculated using unrounded data.

## Peace III Funding: Applications

**Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the women's organisations that applied to the Special EU Programmes Body for Peace III funding in the last five years; (ii) the successful applications; and (iii) the level of funding awarded to each organisation.

### (AQW 10143/11-15)

**Mr Wilson:** Women's organisations that have applied for PEACE III funding in the past five years.

The following women's organisations applied directly to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) for PEACE III funding.

- Shankill Women's Centre
- Training for Women Network (TWN)
- Women's Aid Foyle

The following women's organisations applied for PEACE III funding under the Programme Theme Acknowledging and Dealing with the Past. This is delivered on behalf of SEUPB by a Consortium comprising the Community Relations Council (CRC) and Pobal.

- Falls Women's Centre
- Inishowen Women's Information Network
- Newry and Mourne Women Ltd
- South Armagh Rural Women's Network
- Training for Women Network (TWN)
- Women in Agriculture
- Women's TEC

Finally, there are 14 Peace and Reconciliation Action Plans developed at local authority level and approved by SEUPB. The following women's organisations applied for funding under these Plans.

- ATLAS Women's Centre
- Ballybeen Women's Centre
- Cookstown & District Women's Group
- Falls Women's Centre
- Irish Country Women's Association
- Kilcooley Women's Centre
- Kilcooley Women's Education & Development Group
- Louth Women's Network
- Mid Ulster Women's Network
- Newry and Mourne Women Ltd
- North Down & Ards Women's Forum
- North Leitrim Women's Centre
- Omagh Women's Area Network
- Second Chance Education for Women
- Shannon Valley Women's Group
- South Armagh Rural Women's Network
- Training for Women Network (TWN)
- Women of the World
- Women's Aid Foyle
- Women's Information Northern Ireland
- Women's Resource and Development Agency
- Women's TEC

### Successful applications and level of funding awarded.

The following women's organisations were successful with their PEACE III applications and were awarded the amounts indicated.

#### Successful PEACE III applications to SEUPB

| Organisation                     | Project title              | Total Award £ |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Shankill Women's Centre          | Small Wonders Childcare II | 700,740.00    |
| Training for Women Network (TWN) | Positive Relations Project | 2,766,645.00  |

| Organisation                     | Project title                | Total Award £ |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| Training for Women Network (TWN) | Extending Positive Relations | 2,864,137.00  |

#### Successful PEACE III applications to the Consortium

| Organisation                       | Project title                 | Total Award £ |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Falls Women's Centre               | Training & Employment Project | 155,661.57    |
| South Armagh Rural Women's Network | Behind the Masks              | 317,593.14    |

#### Successful applications under the Local Peace and Reconciliation Action Plans

| Organisation                            | Project title   | Total Award £ |
|---|---|---------------|
| ATLAS Women's Centre                    | Past, Present, Future   | 27,345.04     |
| ATLAS Women's Centre                    | Tree mend us  | 64,384.00     |
| Ballybeen Women's Centre                | Ballybeen Women's Centre - Good Relations Project   | 23,735.00     |
| Cookstown & District Women's Group      | Step by Step Together   | 29,997.00     |
| Irish Country Women's Association       | Women Together  | 4,086.96      |
| Kilcooley Women's Centre                | The Horizon Project   | 49,413.05     |
| Kilcooley Women's Centre                | Priority 6 Support for Representative, Inclusive and Effective Decision Making - The 1325 Project | 263,998.29    |
| Kilcooley Women's Centre                | KCF - Supporting Women  | 270,965.00    |
| Louth Women's Network                   | Cultural Exchange with rural women in Northern Ireland  | 26,086.96     |
| Mid Ulster Women's Network              | Lets Listen - A talking beyond the boundaries Programme   | 27,544.83     |
| Newry & Mourne Women Ltd                | Women celebrating Intercultural Diversity Together  | 21,739.13     |
| Newry & Mourne Women Ltd                | Newry & Mourne Women Ltd  | 21,739.13     |
| North Down & Ards Women's Forum         | The 1325 Project  | 50,315.10     |
| North Leitrim Women's Centre            | Leitrim Women on the Web  | 5,217.39      |
| Second Chance Education for Women       | Cross Border Women's Reconciliation project   | 13,344.64     |
| South Armagh Rural Women's Network      | One Small Step  | 18,956.28     |
| Women's Resource and Development Agency | Good Relations - Politics and Progress  | 24,793.00     |
| Women's TEC                             | Bits & Pieces-BAP   | 25,000.00     |

#### Peace III Funding: Complaints

**Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of complaints his Department has received about the Special EU Programmes Body's Peace III Managing Authority; (ii) the nature of each complaint; and (iii) what action his Department has taken in relation to each complaint.

**(AQW 10144/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Department of Finance and Personnel has received eight complaints regarding the Special EU Programmes Body in its role as PEACE III Managing Authority.

The nature of each complaint and the action taken by the Department are detailed overleaf.

| Year | Nature of complaint  | Action taken  |
|------|--|---|
| 2007 | Insufficient guidance for local authorities in relation to PEACE III cluster arrangements.                 | Written response from Minister's Private Secretary advised of the guidance in place and responded to the specific queries raised.   |
| 2007 | Community background of PEACE III Monitoring and Steering Committee members.                               | Written response from Minister advised of the membership structure and the nominations process, and confirmed the responsibilities of SEUPB and DFP Minister to ensure that all groups are appropriately represented and all voices heard.  |
| 2008 | Community uptake of PEACE III funding.   | Written response from Minister noted importance of participation by all sections of the community and outlined research findings showing both main communities participating significantly. Also advised of SEUPB's outreach work with previously under-represented groups and communities.   |
| 2008 | Community background of PEACE III Steering Committee members.  | Written response from Minister.   |
| 2009 | Implementation of Freedom of Information Code of Practice.   | Written response from Minister noted that a DFP review of appropriateness of Freedom of Information Code of Practice to the North South and European Programmes work of SEUPB was in progress. Advised that consideration of the correspondent's request for information would be considered following completion of the review.  |
| 2009 | Implementation of Freedom of Information Code of Practice.   | Written response from Minister's Private Secretary advised of DFP review of Freedom of Information Code of Practice, and advised that SEUPB would contact the correspondent following conclusion of the review.   |
| 2011 | European Regional Development Fund publicity associated with an event perceived to be political in nature. | Correspondent's concerns raised with SEUPB. Written reply from Minister advised that SEUPB had written to the project expressing concern and requesting no such inappropriate use of Programme logos should be made in future. Minister also noted recent introduction by SEUPB of a code of conduct for projects in receipt of PEACE funding which should allow action to be taken in the event of similar situations in future. |
| 2012 | SEUPB handling of withdrawal of funding from PEACE III projects with irregular expenditure.                | Correspondent's concerns noted and raised with SEUPB.   |

### Special EU Programmes Body: Staffing Review

**Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when a further review of the Special EU Programmes Body's staffing will take place.

**(AQW 10145/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** A further review of the Special EU Programmes Body's staffing will begin summer 2012 and will report before the end of the year.

### Vacant Retail Premises: County Fermanagh

**Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number and percentage of vacant retail premises in Co Fermanagh in each of the last eight years; (ii) the total floor space of all the current vacant retail premises; (iii) what action is being taken to ensure that the vacant premises do not detract from the appearance of towns and villages; and (iv) what action is being taken to fill the premises.

**(AQW 10156/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Information on the number of vacant retail premises by county is not available as data is collated at District Council and Ward level only. Information is not available for the past eight years.

The table overleaf lists (i) the number, and (ii) associated floor space, of vacant retail premises in Fermanagh District Council as at 31st March 2010, 31st March 2011 and 25th March 2012 (which includes the earliest and latest dates for which comparable information is available).

Information on the total number of retail premises, and therefore the percentage which is vacant, in Fermanagh District Council is not available.

#### Vacant Retail Premises in Fermanagh District Council

|                       | Number of Vacant Retail Premises | Total Floor Space (m2) |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| As at 31st March 2010 | 147                              | 71,368                 |
| As at 31st March 2011 | 162                              | 66,014                 |
| As at 25th March 2012 | 178                              | 81,442                 |

Government at any level, is unable to interfere with the rights of private property owners, unless the property in question is dangerous in terms of posing a significant public safety or health risk. However, the Assembly has recently passed legislation from my Department that will encourage long term empty retail property back into use. 50% empty property relief will be available to new occupiers for the first year and this concession can be applied for during the current rating year, that is, to the end of March 2013. To qualify, the property must have been empty for at least a year and last used for retail purposes, however, there are no restrictions on the use that the property can be put to when reoccupied. Also, from 1st April, window displays in empty shops can be used to brighten up shopping areas without incurring full occupied rates. The display must be for community, artistic or non-commercial purposes in order to avail of the relief.

In addition, the Enterprise Minister recently announced that she will be carrying out a comprehensive consultation with the independent retail sector to identify areas of difficulty, develop a co-ordinated approach to helping the sector and explore what the Executive can do to help.

It is a matter for individual property owners to take action to encourage occupation of their premises. However, the measures outlined above should assist property owners to do so.

#### Capital/Revenue Costs: Departmental Spend

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an estimate of the annual additional cost to his Department of providing its services in our divided society, broken down by (i) capital; and (ii) revenue costs.

**(AQW 10170/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** Due to the number of variables involved, it is not possible for my Department to calculate the annual additional cost of service delivery.

#### Departmental Staff: Re-employment

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 7969/11-15, to detail (i) which branch each of the staff were employed in (a) prior to retirement; and (b) after retirement; and (ii) why the role for which they were rehired could not be carried out by a current member of staff.

**(AQW 10245/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The information requested is detailed in the attached tables.

##### Person 1

|      |   |
|------|---|
| (ia) | Central Support Division  |
| (ib) | Information Management Unit   |
| (ii) | Section 45 of the FOI Act Code of Practice places a duty on the Department to put in place an appeals process to ensure applicants are able to ask for an internal review, if they are not content with the Department's decision on release. The review must be a fair and impartial means of reviewing decisions made during the original consideration. These reviews are time consuming and it is difficult for nominated senior staff to fit into their normal duties. This individual was rehired to carry out these reviews. |

##### Person 2

|      |   |
|------|---|
| (ia) | Departmental Solicitors Office  |
| (ib) | Departmental Solicitors Office  |
| (ii) | The Business Case, approved by the Permanent Secretary, demonstrated that the officer had specific skills and intimate knowledge of the project on which he was involved prior to retirement. No other member of staff possessed the necessary mix of skills and knowledge. |

**Person 3**

|      |  |
|------|--|
| (ia) | Land Registry (LPS)  |
| (ib) | Land Registry (LPS)  |
| (ii) | <p>Land Registry was experiencing unprecedented demand for services and the number of applications received was at its highest ever. Many of the applications were complex and required consideration by the small legal team in Land Registry. At this time, the legal team were reduced in numbers due to staff being away from the office on maternity leave.</p> <p>The retired individual has extensive knowledge of Land Registration legislation, Land Registry practice and procedure and had previously used the Land Registry IT system on a daily basis.</p> <p>The Legal Team are qualified Solicitors/Barristers who deal with the most difficult cases in the Registry. There were no other staff within the Registry who could undertake work of this complexity.</p> |

**Person 4**

|      |   |
|------|---|
| (ia) | Census Office (NISRA)   |
| (ib) | Census Office (NISRA)   |
| (ii) | There were no appropriate members of staff available to carry out the role. |

**Person 5**

|      |  |
|------|--|
| (ia) | DSD - Analytical Services  |
| (ib) | Demography and Methodology Branch (NISRA)  |
| (ii) | The work was part of the review of the Noble or NI Multiple Deprivation Measures 2010. The work had a deadline for completion of the review and there were limited staff available. The retired person had five years experience in the Department for Social Development in a key element of the review having published a number of NICS wide reports in the period prior to his retirement. |

**Banks: Redundancies**

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland in relation to the negotiations between the Irish Bank Officials Association, the Allied Irish Bank and the First Trust Bank regarding the settlement for bank officials who face the prospect of redundancy, following the announcement by the Chief Executive of AIB to cut 2,500 jobs in the AIB/First Trust Group in order to deliver a fair and reasonable outcome for all stakeholders, including customers and staff.

**(AQW 10280/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The Department of Finance and Personnel has no role in redundancy settlement negotiations for any staff group and I have not been involved.

**Banks: North/South Ministerial Council Discussions**

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he will take to ensure that the decision of Allied Irish Bank Ltd to cut jobs in the banking sector on the island of Ireland, which will impact on the First Trust Bank, will be discussed at the next North-South Ministerial Sectoral Finance meeting and the North-South Ministerial Council meeting,

**(AQW 10281/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** I wrote to the Irish Minister for Finance on banking issues on 26th March 2012 and suggested in that we have a bilateral meeting in the margins of the next North-South Ministerial Council Plenary or Institutional meeting that we both attend. The next Institutional Meeting is scheduled for 27 April 2012 and the next Plenary meeting for 15th June 2012. I can assure you that we will discuss the issue of staffing levels at both AIB and First Trust.

In my previous discussions with Michael Noonan TD (Irish minister for Finance) and his predecessor regarding the potential impact of restructuring we have agreed that Northern Ireland should not be disproportionately affected.

There is no North South Ministerial Finance Sector. Special EU Programmes Sector meetings are attended by the Irish Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and not the Minister of Finance.

**Small Business Rate Relief Scheme: Multiple Premises**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many small businesses previously in receipt of the Small Business Rate Relief have been excluded from the scheme under the three or more premises rule introduced in 2012.

**(AQW 10304/11-15)**

**Mr Wilson:** The agreed policy is that businesses that occupy four or more properties (multiples) will be excluded from Small Business Rate Relief.

The number of small businesses previously in receipt of Small Business Rate Relief that have now been excluded from the scheme under the 'multiples' rule is 770.

This information is based on LPS initial investigations and may be subject to change after rate demands issue in April 2012.

### Common Strategic Framework: Update

**Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the status of the Common Strategic Framework. (AQO 1766/11-15)

**Mr Wilson:** The Common Strategic Framework, a key guide to producing Cohesion Policy Programmes post 2014, is defined in Article 10 of the European Commission's draft Common Provisions Regulation for the 2014-2020 period which says: In order to promote the harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of the Union, a Common Strategic Framework shall translate the objectives and targets of the Union Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth into key actions for the CSF Funds.

The Common Strategic Framework will be adopted in final form only once the legislative package on Cohesion Policy Funding for the next Multiannual Financial Framework period 2014-2020, proposed on 6th October 2011, has been agreed by the European Parliament and the Council.

On 14 March 2012 the European Commission published a 'Staff Working Document on the Common Strategic Framework' and invited comments from European Institutions. As 'staff working documents' have no formal status this is for the purpose of promoting discussion.

The method by which the Common Strategic Framework will be adopted has not yet been agreed.

## Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

### Abortions: Statistics

**Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why detailed records are not available to explain why individual abortions are carried out at hospitals.

(AQW 9812/11-15)

**Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):** At present, details explaining why abortions are carried out in Northern Ireland are held on the patient's medical records. This information is not currently recorded on the Patient Administration System (PAS) which provides data for the statistics collected by the Department.

Statistics collected by the Department do not currently allow for analysis of the reason that an abortion was carried out.

Given the clear public interest in this issue, I have asked officials to bring forward options for developing a new recording system.

### Pain Management: Clinical Lead Specialist

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to appoint a clinical lead specialist for pain management.

(AQW 9901/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** There are no plans to appoint a clinical lead specialist for pain management in Northern Ireland at the present time; a number of specialist pain management clinics are provided by the HSC Trusts and GPs can refer patients to these clinics where they feel that their current pain management treatment is proving ineffective.

### Human Embryos

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many human embryos have been destroyed in each year since the introduction of publicly funded IVF treatment.

(AQW 9917/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** It should be noted that the most common reasons that embryos are allowed to perish include that embryos are of poor quality and not suitable for transfer to the patient or cryopreservation, the end of the legal consent period for embryo storage has been reached or the couple withdraw consent to continued storage.

The figures for the numbers of embryos that have been discarded in the course of publicly funded treatment in Northern Ireland are given below (only available from 2006) –

| Year of treatment | Number of embryos discarded |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2006              | 1                           |

| Year of treatment | Number of embryos discarded |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2007              | 74                          |
| 2008              | 1151                        |
| 2009              | 916                         |
| 2010              | 811                         |
| 2011              | 1207*                       |
| 2012              | 225*                        |

\* Figures given for 2011 and 2012 are provisional.

### Papers for Assembly Committees

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all occasions in the last 12 months when his Department has made a presentation to an Assembly committee and provided papers pertaining to that presentation to the committee less than 48 hours beforehand.

**(AQW 9931/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Since the beginning of the current mandate, my Department's records indicate that there have been 44 evidence sessions where my Department has made a presentation to the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Of these, there have been four occasions where unavoidable circumstances meant that the relevant papers were provided to the Committee less than 48 hours beforehand. These were as follows;

- (i) A paper on Capital Priorities and 2011/12 Resource Budget was provided to the Committee on the morning of 15 June 2011 for consideration at its meeting held on the afternoon of 15 June 2011;
- (ii) A paper on 2010/11 Resource Spend and 2011/12 Budget was provided to the Committee on 19 September 2011 for consideration at its meeting held on 21 September 2011;
- (iii) A paper on the October Monitoring Round was provided to the Committee on 24 October 2011 for consideration at its meeting on 26 October 2011; and
- (iv) A paper on Primary Care Partnerships was provided to the Committee on 28 November 2011 for consideration at its meeting on 29 November 2011.

My Department endeavours to adhere at all times to the timescales set in Executive guidance for the provision of information between departments and committees.

### Lambrum Tear Hip Surgery

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the procedure from diagnosis to surgery of a lambrum tear to the hip; (ii) where surgery would take place; and (iii) all associated costs.

**(AQW 9958/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** A labrum tear to the hip can be treated in a number of ways including a hip arthroscopy procedure.

Hip arthroscopy is a relatively new procedure and is currently only being performed by a few orthopaedic surgeons in the UK with the equipment and training available to carry out the procedure.

A hip arthroscopy service is not currently commissioned in Northern Ireland. In these circumstances the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has a process in place which supports referrals from clinicians to NHS providers in Great Britain. This process is facilitated via the Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) arrangements and requires a clinician responsible for the care and treatment of an individual patient to write to the HSCB making a request on clinical grounds for treatment by another provider.

The majority of transfers have been to Addenbrooke's Hospital Cambridge, Epsom General Hospital, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust, and Wrightington Hospital.

The cost of a hip arthroscopy procedure is £ 5795.00. Due to the nature of travel arrangements for patients it is not possible to identify all costs specific to ECRs relating to this procedure.

The HSC Board is currently exploring opportunities with HSC Trusts to introduce this service locally.

### Lambrum Tear Hip Surgery

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why lambrum tear surgery is not carried out in out hospitals; and why all such surgery is carried out in England.

**(AQW 9959/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** A labrum tear to the hip can be treated in a number of ways including a hip arthroscopy procedure.



Hip arthroscopy is a relatively new procedure and is currently only being performed by a few orthopaedic surgeons in the UK with the equipment and training available to carry out the procedure.

A hip arthroscopy service is not currently commissioned in Northern Ireland. In these circumstances the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has a process in place which supports referrals from clinicians to NHS providers in Great Britain. This process is facilitated via the Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) arrangements and requires a clinician responsible for the care and treatment of an individual patient to write to the HSCB making a request on clinical grounds for treatment by another provider.

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The HSC Board is currently exploring opportunities with HSC Trusts to introduce this service locally.

### Lambrum Tear Hip Surgery

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide estimated comparative costings for lambrum tear surgery, if it was available in our hospitals, with the cost of the surgery and travel for patients who have travelled to England, in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 9960/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** A labrum tear to the hip can be treated in a number of ways including a hip arthroscopy procedure.

Hip arthroscopy is a relatively new procedure and is currently only being performed by a few orthopaedic surgeons in the UK with the equipment and training available to carry out the procedure.

A hip arthroscopy service is not currently commissioned in Northern Ireland. In these circumstances the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has a process in place which supports referrals from clinicians to NHS providers in Great Britain. This process is facilitated via the Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) arrangements and requires a clinician responsible for the care and treatment of an individual patient to write to the HSCB making a request on clinical grounds for treatment by another provider.

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The cost of a hip arthroscopy procedure is £ 5795.00. Due to the nature of travel arrangements for patients it is not possible to identify all costs specific to ECRs relating to this procedure.

The HSC Board is currently exploring opportunities with HSC Trusts to introduce this service locally.

### Quangos

**Mr Weir** asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the quangos to which his Department makes appointments; (ii) how many members are appointed; and (iii) the remuneration paid to (a) the Chair; and (b) other members.

**(AQW 9992/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** In my capacity as Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety I have responsibility for the appointment of the 17 Chairs and 138 Members of Arm's Length Bodies as detailed in Table 1 below: in addition, a Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland is to be established in 2012 and a Chair 'Designate' has been appointed.

**Table 1**

| (i)<br>Name of organisation | (ii)<br>Membership | (iii) (a) & (b)<br>Remuneration                       |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Belfast HSC Trust           | Chair & 7 Members  | Chair: £34,333 per annum<br>Members:£7,803 per annum  |
| South Eastern HSC Trust     | Chair & 7 Members  | Chair: £29,131 per annum<br>Members: £7,803 per annum |
| Northern HSC Trust          | Chair & 7 Members  | Chair: £29,131 per annum<br>Members::£7,803 per annum |
| Southern HSC Trust          | Chair & 7 Members  | Chair: £29,131 per annum<br>Members: £7,803 per annum |
| Western HSC Trust           | Chair & 7 Members  | Chair: £29,131 per annum<br>Members: £7,803 per annum |
| Health & Social Care Board  | Chair & 7 Members  | Chair: £33,000 per annum<br>Members: £8,827 per annum |

| (i)<br>Name of organisation                             | (ii)<br>Membership | (iii) (a) & (b)<br>Remuneration                          |
|---|--------------------|--|
| Patient & Client Council                                | Chair & 16 Members | Chair: £16,500 per annum<br>Members: £ 3,530 per annum   |
| Public Health Agency                                    | Chair & 7 Members  | Chair: £33,000 per annum<br>Members: £8,827 per annum    |
| Business Services Organisation                          | Chair & 8 Members  | Chair: £22,000 per annum<br>Members: £5,296 per annum    |
| NI Guardian Ad Litem Special HSC Agency                 | Chair & 4 Members  | Chair: £7,014 per annum<br>Members: £2,922 per annum     |
| NI Blood Transfusion Services Special HSC Agency        | Chair & 3 Members  | Chair: £7,014 per annum<br>Members: £1,754 per annum     |
| NI Fire & Rescue Service Board                          | Chair & 10 Members | Chair: £25,195 per annum<br>Members: £5,845 per annum    |
| NI Ambulance Service HSC Trust                          | Chair & 5 Members  | Chair: £22,544 per annum<br>Members: £5,845 per annum    |
| NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery | Chair & 14 Members | Chair: £10,521 per annum<br>Members: NIL – expenses only |
| NI Medical & Dental Training Special HSC Agency         | Chair & 5 Members  | Chair: £13,687 per annum<br>Members: £2,922 per annum    |
| Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority              | Chair & 12 Members | Chair: £17,684 per annum<br>Members: £5,845 per annum    |
| NI Social Care Council                                  | Chair & 12 Members | Chair: £17,060 per annum<br>Members: £6,242 per annum    |
| Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland                 | Chair Designate    | Chair: £34,333 per annum                                 |

### MRI Scans: Transfer to Republic of Ireland

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children were transferred by ambulance to the Republic of Ireland for an MRI scan (i) in 2011; and (ii) to date this year.

**(AQW 10019/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The information requested is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

However, information is available on the number of children currently waiting<sup>1</sup> for an MRI scan at each HSC Trust, and is given in the table below with the median waiting time band:

| HSC Trust               | No. children currently waiting for MRI scan <sup>2</sup> | Median waiting time band (weeks) |
|-------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Belfast                 | 332  | 6-9 weeks                        |
| Northern                | 11   | 0-6 weeks                        |
| South Eastern           | 17   | 0-6 weeks                        |
| Southern                | 72   | 0-6 weeks                        |
| Western                 | 58   | 0-6 weeks                        |
| <b>Northern Ireland</b> | <b>490</b>   | <b>6-9 weeks</b>                 |

**Source:** HSC Trusts

- 1 Position as at 20th February 2012 for the Belfast HSC Trust and 8th March 2012 for the other HSC Trusts
- 2 Children are categorised as patients aged between 0 and 16 years of age, with adults categorised as patients over 16 years of age.

### Group B Streptococcus: New-born Babies

**Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the measures of prevention and services provided for new-born babies with a Group B Streptococcus infection.

**(AQW 10020/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The approach used throughout the UK to prevent Group B Streptococcal (GBS) in newborn babies is based on the identification of clinical risk factors.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) published a guideline in 2003 on the "Prevention of Early Onset Neonatal Group B Streptococcal Disease". It advises healthcare professionals on the clinical assessment of individual women, including risk factors for GBS, and the indications for offering antibiotics during labour. Over 60% of cases of early-onset GBS infection are associated with identifiable risk factors and it is thought that the majority of severely affected cases could be prevented by targeting this group. The RCOG are currently updating their guideline and the revised version is expected to be published in the near future.

In Northern Ireland, the Chief Medical Officer and the acting Chief Nursing Officer have written to healthcare professionals to highlight the clinical management of GBS in pregnancy to ensure that those who are at risk are managed appropriately, and to emphasise the importance of pregnant women being made aware of the risks of GBS in pregnancy as part of their routine antenatal care.

All babies that are unwell will be assessed and treated depending on their clinical needs. Assessment will include testing for infections if this is clinically indicated. A baby with confirmed Group B Streptococcus infection will have treatment based on his or her individual clinical condition. This may include admission to a neonatal unit and treatment with antibiotics

### Group B Streptococcus: Screening Programme

**Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his Department's assessment of the benefits of introducing a Group B Streptococcus screening programme.

**(AQW 10021/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** In Northern Ireland routine screening for Group B Streptococcal infection (GBS) is not provided. This policy is based on the advice of the UK National Screening Committee (NSC), the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

The NSC is an expert body which advises the four UK Health Departments on screening programmes. The NSC has kept under review the evidence for screening for GBS infection and following the most recent review in 2008 the NSC re-affirmed its earlier advice that screening for GBS should not be offered. A further review is currently underway and the review report is expected to be available for consultation this spring.

I will consider carefully all opinions and scientific advice presented to me before making a final decision for Northern Ireland.

### South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Payment of Sub-contractors

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has in place to check (i) if main contractors have paid electrical and mechanical sub-contractors; and (ii) the timescale within which the sub-contractors are paid.

**(AQW 10057/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Construction contracts entered into by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust after March 2010 contain a number of provisions that relate to the payment of subcontractors. These are as follows:

- A requirement that the Contractor will comply with the 'Code of Practice for Government Construction Clients and their Supply Chains' that includes a 'Model Fair Payment Charter' which sets out the values and arrangements relating to Fair Payment commitments and practices; and
- The Contractor will provide the (Design Team ) Lead Consultant with access to accounts to allow timeliness of payments to subcontractors and suppliers to be verified.

Construction contracts entered into by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust after January 2012 require the Contractor to provide at monthly intervals, an update on the payment status of first tier subcontractors using a 'Contractor's Subcontract Payment Report' template.

### Patients: Treated in Great Britain

**Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last five years, to detail (i) the number of times patients from Northern Ireland have received treatment in hospitals in Great Britain; and (ii) the types of treatment received.

**(AQW 10074/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The table below shows, for each year and specialty, the number of times patients from Northern Ireland have been transferred to hospitals in Great Britain for inpatient treatment.

| Specialty                                     | Year      |           |           |           |           |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|   | 2007/2008 | 2008/2009 | 2009/2010 | 2010/2011 | 2011/2012 |
| General Surgery                               | 24        | 134       | 38        | 5         | 3         |
| Urology                                       | 34        | 200       | 251       | 48        | 37        |
| T & O Surgery                                 | 22        | 4,575     | 1,052     | 858       | 996       |
| ENT   | 200       | 37        | 20        | 24        | 2         |
| Ophthalmology                                 | 11        | 308       | 72        | 49        | 25        |
| Oral Surgery                                  | 0         | 6         | 8         | 3         | 0         |
| Restorative Dentistry                         | 4         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Paediatric Dentistry                          | 0         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Orthodontics                                  | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Neurosurgery                                  | 91        | 209       | 220       | 149       | 155       |
| Plastic Surgery                               | 978       | 639       | 42        | 12        | 12        |
| Cardiac Surgery                               | 91        | 114       | 121       | 163       | 140       |
| Paediatric Surgery                            | 12        | 81        | 65        | 57        | 63        |
| Thoracic Surgery                              | 7         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Accident & Emergency                          | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Anaesthetics                                  | 1         | 7         | 3         | 0         | 1         |
| Pain Management                               | 2         | 9         | 7         | 3         | 0         |
| General Medicine                              | 24        | 39        | 38        | 4         | 2         |
| Gastroenterology                              | 15        | 21        | 28        | 10        | 35        |
| Endocrinology                                 | 2         | 4         | 6         | 1         | 0         |
| Haematology                                   | 15        | 28        | 19        | 10        | 22        |
| Audiological Medicine                         | 0         | 2         | 3         | 5         | 4         |
| Clinical Genetics                             | 10        | 22        | 17        | 37        | 53        |
| Rehabilitation                                | 3         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Palliative Medicine                           | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Cardiology                                    | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Dermatology                                   | 0         | 67        | 92        | 80        | 43        |
| Thoracic Medicine                             | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Genito-Urinary<br>Medicine                    | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Nephrology                                    | 2         | 6         | 16        | 5         | 20        |
| Medical Oncology +<br>Clinical (all oncology) | 9         | 66        | 64        | 10        | 31        |
| Neurology                                     | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Clinical Neuro-<br>Physiology                 | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Rheumatology                                  | 0         | 14        | 10        | 6         | 2         |
| Paediatrics                                   | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 63        |

| Specialty                           | Year         |              |              |              |              |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                                     | 2007/2008    | 2008/2009    | 2009/2010    | 2010/2011    | 2011/2012    |
| Paediatric Neurology                | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            |
| Geriatric Medicine                  | 0            | 1            | 2            | 0            | 0            |
| Dental Medicine Specialties         | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            |
| Gynaecology                         | 24           | 47           | 47           | 16           | 28           |
| Obstetrics (Ante Natal)             | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            |
| Obstetrics (Post Natal)             | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            |
| Learning Disability                 | 0            | 0            | 0            | 1            | 1            |
| Mental Illness/Mental Health HCC    | 40           | 29           | 25           | 19           | 23           |
| Child & Adolescent Psychiatry CAMHS | 3            | 10           | 1            | 1            | 4            |
| Physical Disability                 | 7            | 2            | 4            | 3            | 4            |
| Psychotherapy                       | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            |
| Old Age Psychiatry                  | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            |
| Chemical Pathology                  | 3            | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            |
| Haematology                         | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            |
| Joint Consultant Clinic             | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>1,634</b> | <b>6,678</b> | <b>2,271</b> | <b>1,579</b> | <b>1,769</b> |

Source: HSC Board

### Prisoners: Prescription Medicine Overdoses

**Mr B McCrea** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many prisoners have overdosed on prescription medicines in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 10076/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the provision of prison healthcare services. The number of prisoners who have overdosed on prescription medicines across the three prison establishments is detailed in the table below:

| Year    | Number of prisoners who have overdosed on prescription medicines <sup>1</sup> |
|---------|---|
| 2009/10 | 23  |
| 2010/11 | 25  |
| 2011/12 | 35  |

1. These figures include confirmed overdoses along with alleged and suspected overdoses on prescription medicines.

### Accident and Emergency Departments: Good Practice

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to bring Accident and Emergency Department managers together to share good practice.

**(AQW 10077/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I want to ensure that the A&E services as currently commissioned maximise the opportunity for delivery of standards at acceptable levels of quality and safety and therefore the HSC Board has been asked for an assessment of each Trust's application of evidence based good practice in respect of optimising unscheduled care. In addition, the Health and Social Care Board, in liaison with the Public Health Agency has been asked to provide a robust action plan with immediate effect. A key initiative is to establish an Improvement Action Group with the aim of ensuring that long waiting times are addressed and the

patient experience is improved. The Group will work with all Trusts across Northern Ireland and is intended to support Trusts in developing sustainable approaches to managing patient flow and will deal with all issues affecting emergency departments.

### **Accident and Emergency Departments: Waiting Times**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the process through which patients are kept informed of waiting times whilst in triage at Accident and Emergency Departments.

**(AQW 10078/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I am advised that the clinical staff in emergency departments keep patients regularly informed of expected waiting times. Monitors located in emergency departments also display the expected length of wait.

I have asked the HSC Board to provide a robust plan of immediate actions to secure Improvement in Emergency Departments. A key initiative is the establishment of an Improvement Action Group. The aim will be to ensure that long waiting times in Emergency Departments are addressed. I want to see a number of areas explored including the triage process.

### **Accident and Emergency Departments: Triage Process**

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to reform the triage process for patients at Accident and Emergency Departments.

**(AQW 10079/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I am advised that the clinical staff in emergency departments keep patients regularly informed of expected waiting times. Monitors located in emergency departments also display the expected length of wait.

I have asked the HSC Board to provide a robust plan of immediate actions to secure Improvement in Emergency Departments. A key initiative is the establishment of an Improvement Action Group. The aim will be to ensure that long waiting times in Emergency Departments are addressed. I want to see a number of areas explored including the triage process.

### **Human Trafficking: Services for Victims**

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he is implementing the Human Rights Commission 2009 recommendation that a multi-agency approach led by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, together with the PSNI, should be established to co-ordinate services for victims of trafficking to and within Northern Ireland.

**(AQW 10112/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Responsibility for implementing the Council of Europe "Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings" in Northern Ireland primarily falls to the Department of Justice. In February 2011, my Department with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) issued "Working Arrangements for the Welfare and Safeguarding of Child Victims/Suspected Victims of Human Trafficking".

This Guidance sets out the actions to be taken by the PSNI and Health and Social Care Trusts in relation to lone or unaccompanied children, children in the care of an unsuitable adult and children who are recovered during Police operations where there is reasonable cause to believe that the child may be the victim of trafficking. The arrangements outlined in the Guidance are consistent with current child protection and looked after children guidance in Northern Ireland and the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

My Department, in partnership with the Department of Justice, is currently developing guidance with regard to responding to the needs of adult victims of human trafficking. We expect to be in a position to consult on this guidance later in the year.

### **Cancer Patients: North Antrim**

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of cancer patients in the North Antrim area (i) who are currently receiving treatment; and (ii) who have died in each of the last three years, broken down by electoral ward.

**(AQW 10115/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:**

- (i) Table A below outlines the number of cancer patients<sup>1</sup> who received surgery, chemotherapy and/ or radiotherapy in the years 2007-2009 in North Antrim Assembly Area by Electoral Ward. For patient confidentiality reasons, the years have been grouped. The figures have been supplied by the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry and are the most up to date available.
  - (ii) Table B below outlines the number of deaths registered due to cancer<sup>1</sup> in North Antrim Assembly Area for each year between 2008 and 2010 by Electoral Ward. The figures have been supplied by the General Registry's Office and relates to the year of registration of death.
- 1 The ICD10 codes used to classify cancer are C00-C97. For a listing and explanation of ICD-10 codes see International Classification of Diseases for Oncology, 3rd Edition, World Health Organisation, Geneva, 2000. For an explanation of ICD-10 codes see: <http://www.who.int/classifications/apps/icd/icd10online/>

**Table A: The number of cancer patients<sup>1</sup> who received treatment within 12 months of diagnosis in the years 2007-2009 in North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency, by Electoral Ward**

| <b>Electoral Ward Code</b> | <b>Electoral Ward Name</b> | <b>Number receiving treatment*</b> |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 95DD01                     | Academy                    | 39                                 |
| 95DD02                     | Ahoghill                   | 30                                 |
| 95DD03                     | Ardeevin                   | 35                                 |
| 95DD04                     | Ballee                     | 20                                 |
| 95DD05                     | Ballykeel                  | 12                                 |
| 95DD06                     | Ballyloughan               | 35                                 |
| 95DD07                     | Broughshane                | 43                                 |
| 95DD08                     | Castle Demesne             | 19                                 |
| 95DD09                     | Craigyarren                | 32                                 |
| 95DD10                     | Cullybackey                | 38                                 |
| 95DD11                     | Dunclug                    | 13                                 |
| 95DD12                     | Dunminning                 | 21                                 |
| 95DD13                     | Fair Green                 | 25                                 |
| 95DD14                     | Galgorm                    | 36                                 |
| 95DD15                     | Glenravel                  | 30                                 |
| 95DD16                     | Glenwhirry                 | 43                                 |
| 95DD17                     | Grange                     | 23                                 |
| 95DD18                     | Harryville                 | 24                                 |
| 95DD19                     | Kells                      | 33                                 |
| 95DD20                     | Moat                       | 25                                 |
| 95DD21                     | Park                       | 27                                 |
| 95DD22                     | Portglenone                | 31                                 |
| 95DD23                     | Slemish                    | 20                                 |
| 95DD24                     | Summerfield                | 29                                 |
| 95EE01                     | Ballyhoe and Corkey        | 17                                 |
| 95EE02                     | Benvardin                  | 20                                 |
| 95EE03                     | Carnary                    | 15                                 |
| 95EE04                     | Clogh Mills                | 13                                 |
| 95EE05                     | Dervock                    | 25                                 |
| 95EE06                     | Dunloy                     | 20                                 |
| 95EE07                     | Fairhill                   | 27                                 |
| 95EE08                     | Glebe Ballymoney           | 25                                 |
| 95EE09                     | Killoquin Lower            | 27                                 |
| 95EE10                     | Killoquin Upper            | 14                                 |
| 95EE11                     | Knockaholet                | 18                                 |
| 95EE12                     | Newhill                    | 23                                 |

| <b>Electoral Ward Code</b> | <b>Electoral Ward Name</b> | <b>Number receiving treatment*</b> |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 95EE13                     | Route                      | 23                                 |
| 95EE14                     | Seacon                     | 26                                 |
| 95EE15                     | Stranocum                  | 20                                 |
| 95EE16                     | The Vow                    | 18                                 |
| 95UU01                     | Armoy                      | 10                                 |
| 95UU02                     | Ballylough                 | 15                                 |
| 95UU03                     | Bonamargy and Rathlin      | 16                                 |
| 95UU04                     | Bushmills                  | 15                                 |
| 95UU05                     | Carnmoon                   | 10                                 |
| 95UU06                     | Dalriada                   | 23                                 |
| 95UU07                     | Dunseverick                | 16                                 |
| 95UU11                     | Glenshesk                  | 10                                 |
| 95UU12                     | Glentaisie                 | 22                                 |
| 95UU13                     | Kinbane                    | 13                                 |
| 95UU14                     | Knocklayd                  | 14                                 |
| 95UU15                     | Moss-Side and Moyarget     | 8                                  |

\* Treatments consisted of surgery, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy.

**Table B: Number of registered deaths due to cancer<sup>1</sup> in North Antrim Assembly Area for each year between 2008 and 2010 by Electoral Ward.**

| <b>Ward Code</b> | <b>Ward Name</b> | <b>Registration Year</b> |             |             |
|------------------|------------------|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|
|                  |                  | <b>2008</b>              | <b>2009</b> | <b>2010</b> |
| 95DD01           | Academy          | 5                        | 5           | 7           |
| 95DD02           | Ahoghill         | 12                       | 12          | 4           |
| 95DD03           | Ardeevin         | 10                       | 8           | 6           |
| 95DD04           | Ballee           | 6                        | 6           | 7           |
| 95DD05           | Ballykeel        | 3                        | 7           | 2           |
| 95DD06           | Ballyloughan     | 7                        | 8           | 7           |
| 95DD07           | Broughshane      | 6                        | 9           | 13          |
| 95DD08           | Castle Demesne   | 6                        | 5           | 5           |
| 95DD09           | Craigyarren      | 7                        | 6           | 7           |
| 95DD10           | Cullybackey      | 8                        | 5           | 8           |
| 95DD11           | Dunclug          | 1                        | 1           | 2           |
| 95DD12           | Dunminning       | 4                        | 3           | 4           |
| 95DD13           | Fair Green       | 4                        | 10          | 6           |
| 95DD14           | Galgorm          | 5                        | 5           | 6           |
| 95DD15           | Glenravel        | 2                        | 3           | 7           |
| 95DD16           | Glenwhirry       | 6                        | 8           | 9           |
| 95DD17           | Grange           | 4                        | 3           | 4           |



| Ward Code | Ward Name              | Registration Year |      |      |
|-----------|------------------------|-------------------|------|------|
|           |                        | 2008              | 2009 | 2010 |
| 95DD18    | Harryville             | 8                 | 5    | 3    |
| 95DD19    | Kells                  | 5                 | 4    | 7    |
| 95DD20    | Moat                   | 5                 | 5    | 9    |
| 95DD21    | Park                   | 5                 | 2    | 3    |
| 95DD22    | Portglenone            | 5                 | 2    | 8    |
| 95DD23    | Slemish                | 3                 | 7    | 3    |
| 95DD24    | Summerfield            | 3                 | 1    | 4    |
| 95EE01    | Ballyhoe and Corkey    | 2                 | 1    | 3    |
| 95EE02    | Benvardin              | 5                 | 5    | 4    |
| 95EE03    | Carnary                | 6                 | 4    | 6    |
| 95EE04    | Clogh Mills            | 1                 | 3    | 4    |
| 95EE05    | Dervock                | 4                 | 2    | 4    |
| 95EE06    | Dunloy                 | 5                 | 3    | 2    |
| 95EE07    | Fairhill               | 4                 | 6    | 6    |
| 95EE08    | Glebe Ballymoney       | 3                 | 2    | 5    |
| 95EE09    | Killoquin Lower        | 3                 | 4    | 2    |
| 95EE10    | Killoquin Upper        | 7                 | 1    | 2    |
| 95EE11    | Knockaholet            | 1                 | 5    | 4    |
| 95EE12    | Newhill                | 2                 | 7    | 6    |
| 95EE13    | Route                  | 6                 | 6    | 8    |
| 95EE14    | Seacon                 | 5                 | 7    | 5    |
| 95EE15    | Stranocum              | 3                 | 4    | 2    |
| 95EE16    | The Vow                | 2                 | 8    | 4    |
| 95UU01    | Armoy                  | 1                 | 4    | 3    |
| 95UU02    | Ballylough             | 8                 | 2    | 1    |
| 95UU03    | Bonamargy and Rathlin  | 2                 | 4    | 3    |
| 95UU04    | Bushmills              | 3                 | 3    | 3    |
| 95UU05    | Carnmoon               | 1                 | 3    | 2    |
| 95UU06    | Dalriada               | 2                 | 1    | 3    |
| 95UU07    | Dunseverick            | 1                 | 2    | 2    |
| 95UU11    | Glenshesk              | 2                 | 2    | 4    |
| 95UU12    | Glentaisie             | 3                 | 1    | 6    |
| 95UU13    | Kinbane                | 1                 | 5    | 1    |
| 95UU14    | Knocklayd              | 5                 | 3    | 3    |
| 95UU15    | Moss-Side and Moyarget | 2                 | 2    | 4    |

**Ambulances: Downtime**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 9768/11-15, what was the longest ambulance downtime at each hospital, and on how many occasions downtime exceeded two hours.

**(AQW 10116/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** In February 2012, the longest ambulance turnaround times at each site were as follows:

| <b>Location of attendance</b>                | <b>Longest turnaround time (hr:min:sec)</b> |
|--|---|
| Altnagelvin Hospital                         | 01:49:07                                    |
| Antrim Area Hospital                         | 01:39:52                                    |
| Ards Hospital                                | 00:18:45                                    |
| Bangor Hospital                              | 00:33:54                                    |
| Belfast City Hospital                        | 02:34:00                                    |
| Belfast International Airport                | 00:25:00                                    |
| Causeway Hospital                            | 01:58:17                                    |
| Craigavon Area Hospital                      | 03:51:23                                    |
| Daisy Hill Hospital                          | 03:05:49                                    |
| Dalriada Hospital                            | 00:20:47                                    |
| Downe Hospital                               | 00:52:29                                    |
| Downshire Hospital                           | 00:17:44                                    |
| Erne Hospital                                | 01:07:12                                    |
| Forster Green                                | 00:17:52                                    |
| Foyle Hospice                                | 00:06:09                                    |
| Gransha Hospital                             | 00:20:00                                    |
| Holywell Hospital                            | 00:38:14                                    |
| Knockbracken Healthcare Park                 | 00:28:15                                    |
| Lagan Valley Hospital (inc. Lagan Valley GU) | 01:33:49                                    |
| Lurgan Hospital                              | 00:20:14                                    |
| Mater Infirmorum                             | 01:35:53                                    |
| Mid-Ulster Hospital                          | 00:30:03                                    |
| Muckamore Abbey Hospital                     | 00:35:33                                    |
| Musgrave Park Hospital                       | 00:29:23                                    |
| Northern Ireland Cancer Centre               | 01:09:04                                    |
| Omagh General Hospital                       | 00:11:04                                    |
| R/Belfast Hosp For Sick Children             | 02:03:59                                    |
| Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital             | 02:54:11                                    |
| Royal Victoria Hospital                      | 03:20:00                                    |
| South Tyrone Hospital                        | 00:25:46                                    |
| St John's House                              | 00:10:16                                    |
| St Luke's Hospital                           | 00:40:00                                    |
| Tyrone County Hospital                       | 01:22:13                                    |
| Tyrone Fermanagh Psych Hospital              | 00:22:05                                    |

| Location of attendance           | Longest turnaround time (hr:min:sec) |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Ulster Hospital (inc. Ulster GU) | 05:26:15                             |

**Source:** NIAS

In total, out of 12,798 attendances by a resource at a hospital, turnaround time exceeded two hours on 72 occasions (this represents 0.6% of all attendances across the region).

### Minimum Price Structure for Alcohol

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the potential impact of EU competition rules on the introduction of a minimum price structure for alcohol.

**(AQW 10117/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Addressing the harm related to alcohol misuse is a key priority for my Department. To drive forward action on this issue, I recently launched the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2 (NSD), which is a cross-sectoral strategy to reduce the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse.

I am particularly concerned about how some alcohol products are priced, promoted and marketed, and the NSD Phase 2 raises these issues. Therefore, my Department has been working closely with the Department for Social Development who led a joint consultation on the principle of introducing minimum unit pricing in Northern Ireland.

Given the link between consumption and harm and the evidence that affordability is one of the drivers of increased consumption, addressing price could be a key component in any long-term strategic approach to tackling alcohol misuse. I believe that minimum unit pricing has the potential to be compatible with EU Competition requirements, however, 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.

That is why my Department and the Department for Social Development will shortly commission research to model the likely impact of this in Northern Ireland. This will help inform our future decisions in this area, and allow us to bring forward proposals which are proportionate, have a positive impact on mental and physical health and wellbeing and the criminal justice system, and are compatible with EU competition regulations.

It is important to note, however, that minimum unit pricing is only one part of our approach to this issue, and it is important we take a range of actions to address alcohol misuse across the population.

### Holywell Hospital, Antrim: Building Assessment

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the last assessment of the structure, décor, patient comfort and safety and overall suitability of the main building at Holywell Hospital, Antrim, was carried out; and to detail its findings.

**(AQW 10118/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The latest assessment carried out by the Northern Trust and issued to my Department was received in May 2011. This recorded the following assessment for the Main Building at Holywell Hospital, Antrim.

The Block was assessed and graded under the following headings:

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Physical Condition     | Building Graded 'D' (Unacceptable)<br>Engineering Graded 'D' (Unacceptable)   |
| Functional Suitability | Graded 'CX' (Below a standard that is reasonable and adequate and would be impossible or impractical to improve.)             |
| Statutory Standards    | Graded 'C' (Does not conform to statutory legislation but is capable of being upgraded to that level with minor expenditure.) |
| Space Utilisation      | Graded '3' (Adequate, in both provision and use.)   |

Overall Condition Indicators based on Physical Condition:

Rated as Red (Will reflect a building that is, or is becoming largely untenable as a point for the delivery of an HSS service or contains serious inherent risks to life.)

In addition, separate Patient Environment Surveys were carried out by the Department in March 2010. These surveys considered internal finishes and fittings including ceilings, walls, floors, lighting and sanitary ware etc. The following wards which are within the main block were graded as follows:

|         |                          | Beds | Rating |
|---------|--------------------------|------|--------|
| Inver 4 | Continuing care/dementia | 18   | 2      |

|           |                            | <b>Beds</b> | <b>Rating</b> |
|-----------|----------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Inver 3   | Male continuing care       | 12          | 2             |
| Inver 1   | PICU female                | 6           | 2             |
| Carrick 1 | Addictions                 | 10          | 2             |
| Carrick 3 | Rehab                      | 14          | 2             |
| Carrick 4 | Male challenging behaviour | 12          | 2             |
| Lissan 1  | Male PICU                  | 9           | 2             |

Rating 2 – Good condition, minor upgrade required such as repair and repaint <25% of walls/replace <10% of floor finishes/minimal replacement of furniture, notice boards etc.

The Department is progressing the replacement of this facility and has asked the Northern Trust to submit a Strategic Outline Case for this project.

### **Patients: Transfer from Downe Hospital, Downpatrick, to Belfast**

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been transferred from the Downe Hospital, Downpatrick, between the hours of 10.00 pm and 8.00 am, to hospitals in Belfast in each month between 1 April 2011 and 29 February 2012.

**(AQW 10119/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** In responding to this question, ‘hospitals in Belfast’ include those within the greater Belfast area (Royal Victoria, RBHSC, Mater, Royal Maternity and Ulster).

Information on the number of patients transferred from the Downe hospital to hospitals in the greater Belfast area between 10pm and 8am, each month since April 2011, is detailed below:

| <b>Month</b>   | <b>Number of Patients</b> |
|----------------|---------------------------|
| April 2011     | 19                        |
| May 2011       | 11                        |
| June 2011      | 11                        |
| July 2011      | 20                        |
| August 2011    | 13                        |
| September 2011 | 19                        |
| October 2011   | 16                        |
| November 2011  | 12                        |
| December 2011  | 17                        |
| January 2012   | 14                        |
| February 2012  | 20                        |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>172</b>                |

Source: Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS)

### **Patients: Transfer from South Down to Belfast**

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have been transferred from the South Down area, between the hours of 10.00 pm and 8.00 am, to hospitals in Belfast in each month between 1 April 2011 and 29 February 2012.

**(AQW 10120/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** In responding to this question, ‘hospitals in Belfast’ include those within the greater Belfast area (Royal Victoria, RBHSC, Mater, Royal Maternity and Ulster), and the ‘South Down area’ is defined as the South Down Parliamentary Constituency.

It should be noted that information relates to calls responded to by the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) in the South Down Parliamentary Constituency, excluding transfer activity from Downe and Downshire hospitals.

Information on the number of patients transported by the NIAS to hospitals in the greater Belfast area from the South Down Parliamentary Constituency between 10pm and 8am, each month from April 2011, is detailed below:

| Month          | Number of Patients <sup>1</sup> |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| April 2011     | 47                              |
| May 2011       | 36                              |
| June 2011      | 43                              |
| July 2011      | 51                              |
| August 2011    | 64                              |
| September 2011 | 54                              |
| October 2011   | 63                              |
| November 2011  | 43                              |
| December 2011  | 58                              |
| January 2012   | 61                              |
| February 2012  | 52                              |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>572</b>                      |

**Source:** Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust

- 1 Figures exclude transfer activity from Downe and Downshire Hospitals and include all emergency, urgent and routine attendances.

### Rare Diseases: Public Consultation

**Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the public consultation on a UK plan for rare diseases.

**(AQW 10121/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The UK-wide public consultation on the UK plan for rare diseases was launched on 29 February 2012. All responses to the consultation are being submitted directly to the Department of Health in England to co-ordinate on behalf of the four UK Health Departments. When the consultation period ends on 25 May 2012, the four UK Health Departments will assess these responses to inform the final version of the plan and resulting implementation plan.

### Accident and Emergency Departments: Impact of Patient Alcohol Intake

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what analysis he has carried out of the impact of patients' excessive alcohol intake on the pressures on Accident and Emergency Departments.

**(AQW 10122/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** A study undertaken at Altnagelvin Hospital in 2009 indicated that around one third of all attendances had a direct link to alcohol. Studies in England and Scotland have sought to quantify the proportion of emergency department visits which are linked to alcohol misuse but these estimates showed a wide degree of variation. The Scottish Government has estimated that 25% of all attendances at emergency departments are alcohol related.

The alcohol consumption of people attending emergency departments, particularly those who accompany patients, can often result in nuisance and disturbance behavior which affects both staff and patients. I am meeting with the Minister of Justice on 16 April to discuss further how the problems caused by those threatening staff and patient safety can be addressed

I have not carried out an analysis of the impact of alcohol pricing on pressures on emergency departments.

### Accident and Emergency Departments: Impact of Alcohol Pricing

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has carried out any analysis of the impact of alcohol pricing on the pressures on Accident and Emergency Departments.

**(AQW 10123/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** A study undertaken at Altnagelvin Hospital in 2009 indicated that around one third of all attendances had a direct link to alcohol. Studies in England and Scotland have sought to quantify the proportion of emergency department visits which are linked to alcohol misuse but these estimates showed a wide degree of variation. The Scottish Government has estimated that 25% of all attendances at emergency departments are alcohol related.

The alcohol consumption of people attending emergency departments, particularly those who accompany patients, can often result in nuisance and disturbance behavior which affects both staff and patients. I am meeting with the Minister of Justice on 16 April to discuss further how the problems caused by those threatening staff and patient safety can be addressed

I have not carried out an analysis of the impact of alcohol pricing on pressures on emergency departments.

### **Hospital Beds**

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how Health and Social Care Trusts work together to ensure that best practice is followed when freeing up hospital beds

**(AQW 10124/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Trusts adhere to a hospital discharge policy whereby hospital, social work and community staff work closely together to undertake a multidisciplinary assessment in partnership with patients and families. Depending on this assessment, the Trust will discharge the patient either into intermediate care or other discharge pathways.

The HSC Board works with Trusts in a variety of ways to help ensure that best practice is followed when freeing up hospital beds. On an ongoing basis the Board works with Trusts to ensure that best practice approaches are deployed. The Board's unscheduled care audit team conducts a comprehensive audit with hospitals to ensure demonstrable improvement is evidenced.

In addition the HSC Board, in liaison with the Public Health Agency, have established an Improvement Action Group with the aim of ensuring that long waiting times are addressed and the patient experience is improved. The Group will work with all Trusts across Northern Ireland and is intended to support Trusts in developing sustainable approaches to managing patient flow and will deal with all issues affecting emergency departments

### **Pain Management: Training**

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he intends to take to improve education and training for healthcare professionals in pain management.

**(AQW 10133/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Specific training in pain management in undergraduate and postgraduate education programmes is carried out across the range of healthcare professions. The training provided is subject to regular review and updated as necessary in line with emerging technologies.

### **Accident and Emergency Departments: Admissions due to Drug Abuse**

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients, under the age of 18, have been treated in Accident and Emergency Departments in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area for the effects of illegal drugs in each of the last 12 months.

**(AQW 10134/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The information requested is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

### **Accident and Emergency Departments: Admissions due to Alcohol Abuse**

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients, under the age of 18, have been treated in Accident and Emergency Departments in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area for the effects of alcohol in each of the last 12 months.

**(AQW 10136/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** It is assumed that this question refers to the number of people under the age of 18 who have attended Accident and Emergency Departments in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area as a result of the effects of alcohol in each of the last 12 months.

The information requested is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

### **Alcohol Consumption**

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any statistics his Department holds on the level of alcohol consumption per capita; and how this compares with the Irish Republic, the United Kingdom as a whole, and other EU regions.

**(AQW 10146/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Information on the level of alcohol consumption per capita is not available for Northern Ireland. However, information from the following sources is available on the proportion of the Northern Ireland population who drink alcohol:

1. Adult drinking patterns in Northern Ireland - This report examines the amount of alcohol respondents consumed, when, where and what they drank, who they drank with, together with binge and problem drinking. The latest report is available at: [http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/adult\\_drinking\\_patterns\\_in\\_northern\\_ireland\\_2011.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/adult_drinking_patterns_in_northern_ireland_2011.pdf).

2. Health Survey Northern Ireland – Summary information on the percentage of respondents who reported drinking in excess of the weekly drinking limits can be found at: [http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/health\\_survey\\_northern\\_ireland\\_-\\_first\\_results\\_from\\_the\\_2010-11\\_survey.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/health_survey_northern_ireland_-_first_results_from_the_2010-11_survey.pdf)

Information on the proportion of people who drink alcohol in each UK jurisdiction and the Republic of Ireland is presented below:

**Proportion of people who drink alcohol in Northern Ireland, England and the Republic Ireland**

| Base Year            | Country                          | % of males who drink alcohol | % of females who drink alcohol | % of population who drink alcohol |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2011                 | Northern Ireland <sup>2</sup>    | 78                           | 72                             | 74                                |
| 2010/11              | Republic of Ireland <sup>3</sup> | 76                           | 65                             | 71                                |
| 2008                 | England <sup>4</sup>             | 71                           | 56                             | -                                 |
| 2007                 | Wales <sup>5</sup>               | 88                           | 80                             | -                                 |
| 2008/09 <sup>1</sup> | Scotland <sup>6</sup>            | 90                           | 86                             | 88                                |

- 1 Refers to two years worth of survey data.
- 2 Source: Adult Drinking Patterns in Northern Ireland 2011, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.
- 3 Source: Drug Prevalence Survey in Ireland 2010/11, National Advisory Committee on Drugs, Dublin.
- 4 Source: Statistics on Alcohol: England 2010.
- 5 Source: A Profile of Alcohol and Health in Wales (2009), Wales Centre for Health.
- 6 Source: Scottish Health Survey 2009.

Information on alcohol consumption on other EU regions is contained within the following report published in 2011 by the World Health Organisation, available at:

[http://www.who.int/substance\\_abuse/publications/global\\_alcohol\\_report/msbgsruprofiles.pdf](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/msbgsruprofiles.pdf)

**Alcohol Consumption**

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the level of alcohol consumption per capita in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 10147/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Information on the level of alcohol consumption per capita is not available. However, information is available on the proportion of the Northern Ireland population who drink alcohol and those who exceeded the daily and weekly recommended drinking levels for 2005, 2008 and 2011.

**Proportion of Northern Ireland population who drink alcohol and those who exceeded the daily and weekly recommended drinking levels**

|      | % of population who drink alcohol in the week prior to the survey | % who exceeded recommended daily drinking levels on at least one occasion <sup>1</sup> | % who exceeded recommended weekly drinking levels <sup>2</sup> |
|------|---|--|--|
| 2005 | 73  | 82   | 29   |
| 2008 | 72  | 81   | 24   |
| 2011 | 74  | 78   | 23   |

- 1 The current daily sensible drinking levels are no more than 4 units of alcohol for males and no more than 3 units of alcohol for females.
- 2 The current weekly sensible drinking levels are no more than 21 units of alcohol for males and no more than 14 units of alcohol for females.

**Source:** Adult Drinking Patterns Surveys, NISRA.

### Accident and Emergency Departments: Admissions due to Alcohol Abuse

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of alcohol related admissions for Accident and Emergency Departments in each of the last ten years, broken down by hospital.

**(AQW 10148/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** It is assumed that this question refers to the number of alcohol related attendances at Accident and Emergency Departments in each of the last ten years, broken down by hospital.

The information requested is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

### Antrim Area Hospital: Delayed Discharges

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a breakdown of the reasons for delayed discharges from the Antrim Area Hospital in each of the last three years.

**(AQW 10151/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** My Department currently monitors information on delayed discharges from acute hospitals against the standard that:

'90% of complex discharges from an acute hospital setting take place within 48 hours of the decision to discharge; all non-complex discharges from an acute hospital setting take place within six hours of being declared medically fit; and, no discharge from an acute hospital setting takes longer than seven days.'

A delayed discharge refers to any patient remaining in hospital after the time they were deemed medically fit for discharge.

The table below presents information on the main reasons for discharges being delayed longer than the agreed length of time outlined above, at Antrim Area Hospital, during each of the last three years.

| Reason for Discharge Delay                              | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 <sup>1</sup> |
|---|---------|---------|----------------------|
| Awaiting ambulance                                      | 16.0%   | 21.0%   | 11.2%                |
| Pharmacy delay in patient receiving drugs               | 27.8%   | 16.4%   | 4.1%                 |
| Awaiting tertiary care bed                              | 0.3%    | 2.5%    | 26.4%                |
| Awaiting transport from family or friends               | 12.1%   | 13.4%   | 7.5%                 |
| No suitable step down bed available                     | 0.0%    | 1.3%    | 11.9%                |
| Essential equipment/adaptations not available/completed | 4.5%    | 5.3%    | 4.4%                 |
| No capacity in domiciliary care providers               | 4.5%    | 3.9%    | 3.8%                 |
| Care planning incomplete                                | 4.7%    | 2.0%    | 4.7%                 |
| Funding issue   | 5.6%    | 4.4%    | 1.4%                 |
| Assessment of appropriate care requirement incomplete   | 2.1%    | 3.1%    | 2.1%                 |
| No nursing home bed available                           | 0.7%    | 2.0%    | 2.0%                 |
| Patient/family resistance                               | 1.5%    | 1.9%    | 0.9%                 |
| Other   | 20.2%   | 22.8%   | 19.6%                |

**Source:** Admissions & Discharges Universe

1 Includes delayed discharges between 1st April 2011 and 29th February 2012 (inclusive).

### Accident and Emergency Departments: Acute Hospitals

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the change in the numbers and percentage increase of patients who presented at Accident and Emergency Departments in each of the acute hospitals between 1 September and 1 March in (i) 2011; and (ii) 2012.

**(AQW 10152/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The table below details the change in the number of new and unplanned review attendances at emergency care departments for the six month period from the start of September to the end of February in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12:



**Change in the Number of Attendances at Emergency Care Departments  
(1st September 2010 to 28th February 2011 and 1st September 2011 to 29th February 2012) 1**

| Emergency Care Department | Number of New and Unplanned Review Attendances |                           | Change  |        |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|---------|--------|
|                           | 1 Sept 2010 - 28 Feb 2011                      | 1 Sept 2011 - 29 Feb 2012 | Number  | %      |
| Belfast City Hospital     | 21,758   | 6,783                     | -14,975 | n/a    |
| Mater Hospital            | 19,953   | 21,490                    | 1,537   | 7.7%   |
| Royal Hospital            | 35,895   | 43,258                    | 7,363   | 20.5%  |
| RBHSC                     | 15,754   | 16,329                    | 575     | 3.6%   |
| Antrim                    | 34,547   | 34,377                    | -170    | -0.5%  |
| Whiteabbey                | 4,088  | 4,073                     | -15     | -0.4%  |
| Mid Ulster                | 2,843  | 2,944                     | 101     | 3.6%   |
| Causeway                  | 20,339   | 19,835                    | -504    | -2.5%  |
| Ulster Hospital           | 36,010   | 38,441                    | 2,431   | 6.8%   |
| Ards MIU                  | 4,155  | 4,347                     | 192     | 4.6%   |
| Bangor MIU                | 5,791  | 5,761                     | -30     | -0.5%  |
| Lagan Valley Hospital     | 15,660   | 11,909                    | -3,751  | -24.0% |
| Downe Hospital            | 10,013   | 9,401                     | -612    | -6.1%  |
| Craigavon Hospital        | 34,794   | 34,720                    | -74     | -0.2%  |
| Daisyhill Hospital        | 17,063   | 17,674                    | 611     | 3.6%   |
| South Tyrone Hospital     | 7,711  | 8,661                     | 950     | 12.3%  |
| Armagh/Mullinure          | 3,523  | 3,611                     | 88      | 2.5%   |
| Altnagelvin               | 25,484   | 25,296                    | -188    | -0.7%  |
| Erne Hospital             | 12,503   | 12,778                    | 275     | 2.2%   |
| Tyrone County             | 6,318  | 6,963                     | 645     | 10.2%  |

**Source:** EC1 Return DHSSPS

- Information for January and February 2012 is provisional and may be subject to change.
- Belfast City emergency care department closed on a temporary basis on 1st November 2011.

**Capital/Revenue Costs: Departmental Spend**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an estimate of the annual additional cost to his Department of providing its services in our divided society, broken down by (i) capital; and (ii) revenue costs.

**(AQW 10171/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Due to the number of variables involved, it is not possible for DHSSPS to calculate the annual additional cost of service delivery.

**Antrim Area Hospital: Dr Ian Rutter**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) Mr Ian Rutter's role at the Antrim Area Hospital in the last three months; (ii) when he was appointed to the role; (iii) whether his role was related to the assessment carried out by Mrs Mary Hinds; (iv) when he will report his findings; (v) to whom he will report; and (vi) whether his report will be published.

**(AQW 10179/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The Northern HSC Trust has advised that Dr Ian Rutter visited the Trust on 1 March 2012. He has been asked by the Trust and the HSC Board to provide support to the Trust in reviewing the interface between the acute sector and primary care. This role is in no way related to the recent support and assistance provided by Mrs Mary Hinds, which had a particular focus on

unscheduled care at Antrim Area Hospital. Dr Rutter will report to the HSC Board public meeting in April 2012 and details of this report will be published

### **Accident and Emergency Departments: Admissions due to Drug Abuse**

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people under the age of 18 have been admitted to Accident and Emergency Departments in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area as a result of drug abuse in each of the last 12 months.

**(AQW 10201/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** It is assumed that this question refers to the number of people under the age of 18 who have attended Accident and Emergency Departments in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area as a result of drug abuse in each of the last 12 months.

The information requested is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

### **Accident and Emergency Departments: Admissions due to Alcohol Abuse**

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients, under the age of 18, have been treated in Accident and Emergency Departments in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area for the effects of alcohol in the last 12 months.

**(AQW 10202/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** It is assumed that this question refers to the number of people under the age of 18 who have attended Accident and Emergency Departments in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area as a result of the effects of alcohol in each of the last 12 months.

The information requested is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

### **Dementia Services: Funding**

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any of the enhanced budget for research into dementia recently announced at Westminster will benefit dementia services in Northern Ireland.

**(AQW 10203/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I welcome the recent announcement from Mr Cameron detailing an increase in funding for dementia research. Research into dementia is vitally important if we are to provide improved diagnosis, more effective treatments and better outcomes for people living with dementia. Any developments resulting from research into this condition, whether they are made locally or internationally, will benefit people living with dementia everywhere through good practice and dissemination of new ideas.

While this research budget will have no direct impact on the levels of funding in Northern Ireland, the impact of dementia in the UK, and indeed world-wide, calls for a co-ordinated approach to research. Northern Ireland researchers and professionals will continue to collaborate with others to maximise the impact of research funding and expertise.

### **Rathfriland Fire Station: Smoke Alarm**

**Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether smoke alarms are routinely installed in all fire stations; and (ii) whether a smoke alarm was installed at Rathfriland Fire Station where fire damage occurred recently.

**(AQW 10205/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:**

- (i) All two-storey and refurbished Fire Stations are fitted with fire alarms; these alarms include both smoke and heat detection. Non-refurbished single storey Fire Stations do not have a fire alarm system.
- (ii) Rathfriland Fire Station was a single storey station and, at the time of the fire in July 2009, no fire alarm was fitted. The current refurbishment programme for Rathfriland includes a fire alarm system providing smoke and heat detection.

### **Dental Services: Mid-Ulster Hospital**

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the salaried dental service at the Mid-Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt, to detail (i) the number of adult and child patients currently registered; (ii) the costs, including building and capital costs, incurred in the set-up of this service; (iii) the total running costs incurred by the service in the last 12 months, including staff, maintenance, laboratory and materials; and (iv) the gross Health Service item of service fees generated by the service, including the patient contribution to Health Service charges, between 1 February 2011 and 31 January 2012.

**(AQW 10208/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The information to answer this question is set out below:

- (i) At 29 March 2012 there were 1,593 adult patients and 336 child patients registered with the Salaried Dental Service at the Mid-Ulster Hospital.
- (ii) The building costs for conversion of Ward 1 at the Mid-Ulster Hospital, including construction work and Estates Services costs, to two dental surgeries with a local decontamination unit, store, waiting area, reception and plant house was

£161,137. The equipment/medical devices costs for two fully equipped dental surgeries including digital radiography were £101,415.

- (iii) The total running costs for the service in the last 12 months were £89,700.
- (iv) The gross Health Service item of service fees generated by the service, including the patient contribution to Health Service charges for the period 1 February 2011 to 31 January 2012 were £52,370. These fees are for activity associated with a dentist in place 3 days a week for 8 months, and 1 full time for the remaining 4 months.

### Departmental Staff: Salaries

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many departmental staff are paid over £100,000 per annum.

**(AQW 10213/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Two senior officials in my Department are currently paid in excess of £100,000 per annum.

### Gastroenterology: Consultants

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many consultants specialising in gastroenterology are employed by the Health Service.

**(AQW 10219/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts have advised that at April 2012, there were a total of 36 (34.0 Whole-time equivalent) consultants specialising in Gastroenterology employed within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Belfast Health and Social Care Trust return included joint academic appointments and Hepatology).

### Healthy Food: Displays in Shops

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department is taking to encourage shops to display fruit and other healthy foods more prominently where customers queue to pay for goods.

**(AQW 10221/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I launched the cross-sectoral Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022: A Fitter Future for All on 9 March 2012. This Framework contains outcomes regarding the accessibility of foods within a variety of settings and includes specifically:

- food retailers encouraged and enabled to consider reducing point of sale placement of foods which are high in fat, salt, sugar and increasing exposure to promotion of healthier foods;
- increased availability and consumption of healthy foods, particularly fruit and vegetables; and
- healthier food options are available and accessible to the whole population.

My Department has no specific authority to impose restrictions on what is available to customers at Point-of-Sale, however we are working closely with key stakeholders to encourage shops make healthier options more accessible. Implementation of the outcomes above will be primarily led by the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland (FSANI) and the Public Health Agency (PHA).

The FSANI is working towards encouraging the promotion of healthy foods in a variety of settings and is working with the PHA to achieve this. In relation to Point-of-Sale choices the FSANI are currently:

- arranging one-to-one information meetings with retailers;
- setting up a retailing forum group representing retailers in Northern Ireland; and
- working jointly with the PHA to support Dietitians and Environmental Health Officers in the delivery of food labelling workshops and supermarket tours for targeted groups of consumers.

At present, the PHA is not engaged in activity directly with retailers, however it is engaged in a range of activity focussed on the wider food sector and in particular the catering sector including actions such as:

- working in partnership with HSC Trusts and the Food Standards Agency to deliver accredited nutrition training for Environmental Health Officers from local councils;
- working in partnership with local councils and HSC Trusts to develop a new healthier catering award for Northern Ireland; and
- contributing to the implementation of policies and guidelines for a number of key groups and settings, including health service facilities, leisure facilities in councils and schools.

### Mental Health: Assistance for Families

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assistance is provided for families in which members suffer from mental health problems.

**(AQW 10233/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Community mental health staff are encouraged to involve families in treatment and care plans where this is acceptable to all parties. Carer advocates can also provide support and advice.

Northern Ireland is well served by a number of voluntary organisations working in the mental health field. The key organisations include: The Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health, Action Mental Health, Aware Defeat Depression, Threshold, Mindwise and CAUSE. Each organisation provides a range of advice, community services to help individuals, families and carers with mental health needs recover from their illness and rehabilitate them to enjoy fulfilling lives in the community. CAUSE provides services specifically for carers of people with mental health problems.

### **Brain Injuries: Assistance for Families**

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assistance is provided for families in which members suffer from brain injuries.

**(AQW 10234/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The HSC across NI provides a comprehensive range of services both for people who have suffered brain injuries and their families. Services provided range from domiciliary care, respite care, day opportunities, in-patient care, supported living options, multi-professional support, and aids and equipment commensurate with their assessed needs.

In addition, my Department published a two-year Acquired Brain Injury Action Plan on 5 July 2010, following public consultation the previous year. The main purpose of the Action Plan was to provide clear, time-bound goals to drive service improvement and to coordinate action in order to improve outcomes for patients (regardless of age), their families and carers.

### **Brain Injuries and Mental Health Problems: Respite Services**

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what respite services are available for people with (i) brain injuries; and (ii) mental health problems who are aged (a) under 35; (b) between 35 and 60; and (c) over 60.

**(AQW 10235/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The information is not available in the format requested.

### **Brain Injuries: Numbers Treated**

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been treated for brain injuries in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 10236/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The number of people who have been treated in an inpatient setting during each of the last five years where brain injury was recorded as the primary diagnosis is shown in the following table:-

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Individuals Treated for Brain Injuries</b> |
|-------------|---|
| 2006/07     | 466   |
| 2007/08     | 555   |
| 2008/09     | 578   |
| 2009/10     | 568   |
| 2010/11     | 537   |

**Source:** Hospital Inpatient System

### **Oasis Dental Care**

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to Oasis Dental Care, to detail (i) the number of adult and child patients currently registered; (ii) the costs, including building and capital costs, incurred in the set-up of this service; (iii) the total running costs incurred by the salaried dental service at Oasis Dental Care in the last 12 months, including staff, maintenance, laboratory and materials; and (iv) the gross Health Service item of service fees generated by Oasis Dental Care, including the patient contribution to Health Service charges, between 1 February 2011 and 31 January 2012.

**(AQW 10247/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The information to answer this question is set out below:

- (i) In March 2012, there were 37,938 adult and 9,423 child patients registered with Oasis Dental Care practices.
- (ii) & (iii) The set up and running costs for Oasis Dental Care practices are met by Oasis Dental Care as part of their contract with the HSC Board and are not held by my Department or the HSC Board. The value of the contract with Oasis Dental Care for the provision of dental services is £5.7 million per year.
- (iv) Oasis Dental Care are paid on the basis of their contract with the HSC Board and do not receive item of service payments. However, based upon the item of service treatments carried out by Oasis practices between 1 February 2011 and 31 January 2012, the gross Health Service item of service fees, including patient contributions, which would have been generated by Oasis Dental care work is estimated at £1,520,000.

### Prostate Cancer Patients: Abiraterone

**Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration his Department has given to providing abiraterone for prostate cancer patients, given that it has been made available on prescription in Wales.

**(AQW 10257/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Any decision on the provision of abiraterone for prostate cancer patients is a matter for each Health jurisdiction to determine separately.

I can advise that the prostate cancer abiraterone whilst not currently approved by NICE, can be accessed by patients in Northern Ireland through the Individual Funding Request (IFR) process if their consultant considers the drug to be of benefit to them. All cases are dealt with on an individual basis and considered on its merits.

NICE published a draft technology appraisal on 1st February 2012 which does not recommend the use of abiraterone. This guidance has now been issued for consultation. NICE is due to publish the final guidance in June 2012; however this date may change should any revisions to the guidance be required as a result of the consultation.

### Occupational Therapy: Review of Provision

**Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Public Health Agency review of occupational therapy provision at special educational needs and mainstream schools.

**(AQW 10258/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Following Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's review of occupational therapy provision in special schools in Belfast, the Public Health Agency (PHA) on behalf of the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has been tasked to undertake a regional review of how Allied Health Professional (AHP) services, including occupational therapy, are accessed by children in mainstream and special schools. The aim is to ensure equity of access to these key services for all children across Northern Ireland, based on need and irrespective of what kind of school they attend. It is hoped that the review will get under way shortly and the PHA will seek to employ a collaborative, multi-agency approach and plans to work in partnership with the Department of Education and the Education Library Boards.

### Pharmacies: Annual Rural Payment

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the pharmacies that will receive an annual rural payment from his Department.

**(AQW 10268/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** I announced to the Assembly on the 13 March 2012 that an additional £8m funding was to be made available in the 2011/2012 financial year to support new services, improve premises and support staffing of community pharmacies particularly in rural and deprived areas. I can confirm that some 73 pharmacies have received the rural support payment in 2011/12. This payment, the criteria for which will be subject to review, is tiered to reflect dispensing activity and payable to pharmacies greater than 1km away from the nearest pharmacy.

Under the Data Protection Act 1998 it would be inappropriate for me to release data relating to payments made to any named pharmacy practice or individual as the information is considered commercial in confidence.

### Slievemore Nursing Unit

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has any plans to close the Slievemore Nursing Unit in the Foyle constituency.

**(AQW 10269/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** Slievemore Nursing Unit is a unit providing specialist services for people with dementia who present with challenging behaviour. Placements in the unit are allocated on a temporary basis and are kept under continual review with a view to returning people to their own accommodation or nursing care home where their needs can be met appropriately in the long term.

The Trust is currently in the process of reviewing Older Peoples Mental Health Services for both inpatient and community services including Slievemore Nursing Unit. No decision has been made regarding the future provision of services at Slievemore Nursing Unit

### Abortions

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last five financial years, to detail (i) the number of pregnancies terminated in each Health and Social Care Trust area, and the reasons for the procedures; (ii) for an estimate of the number of pregnancies terminated in the private sector; and (iii) the number of patients treated by each Health and Social Trust area in connection with a termination not carried out by Trust.

**(AQW 10274/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:**

- i) The number of pregnancies terminated, in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years is shown below. Information on the reasons for the procedures is not collected currently centrally, but I have asked officials to consider how this can be introduced.

| HSC Trust              | Number of Abortions |         |         |         |         |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                        | 2006/07             | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
| Belfast                | 26                  | 22      | *       | 11      | *       |
| Northern               | 15                  | 23      | 16      | *       | 18      |
| South Eastern          | 23                  | 20      | 22      | 21      | 17      |
| Southern               | *                   | 16      | 16      | 23      | 21      |
| Western                | *                   | 10      | *       | *       | *       |
| Northern Ireland Total | 79                  | 91      | 77      | 67      | 75      |

**Source:-** Hospital Inpatient System (HIS)

- \* In line with the Office of National Statistics (ONS) guidance, appropriate cells have been masked to protect patient confidentiality.
- ii) It is not possible to provide an estimate of the number of pregnancies terminated in the private sector.
- iii) Information is not available on the number of patients treated by each Health and Social Care Trust area in connection with a termination not carried out by the Trust.

### Accident and Emergency Department: Causeway Hospital

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff worked in the Accident and Emergency Department at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine, in January (i) 2004; (ii) 2006; (iii) 2008; (iv) 2010; and (v) 2012.

**(AQW 10286/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The information requested is provided in the tables below. This information has been obtained directly from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and has not been validated by the Department.

#### Medical staff employed at Causeway Hospital by Grade and Year

| Grade | Causeway Hospital Medical Staff |                      |                       |
|-------|---------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
|       | Consultants                     | Middle Grade Doctors | Trainee Grade Doctors |
|       | WTE                             | WTE                  | WTE                   |
| 2004  | 2.00                            | 1.00                 | 7.00                  |
| 2006  | 3.00                            | 1.00                 | 7.00                  |
| 2008  | 3.00                            | 1.00                 | 7.00                  |
| 2010  | 3.00                            | 1.00                 | 7.00                  |
| 2012  | 3.00                            | 1.00                 | 7.00                  |

**Source:** Northern Health and Social Care Trust

#### Notes:

- 1 WTE = Whole-time Equivalent.
- 2 All figures above are as at January.
- 3 In January 2010, one of the Trainee Grade Doctor posts was filled by a General Practitioner Trainee via the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA), with the remaining 6 posts filled as Locum Appointment for Training via Locum Agencies and internal locums.
- 4 In January 2012, one of the Trainee Grade Doctor posts was filled by a General Practitioner Trainee via NIMDTA, with the remaining 6 posts filled as Locum Appointment for Service via Locum Agencies and internal locums.

**Nursing staff employed at Causeway Hospital by Grade and Year**

| Grade<br>Year | Causeway Hospital Nursing Staff |       |                     |      |
|---------------|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------|------|
|               | Qualified Nurses                |       | Nurse Support Staff |      |
|               | HC                              | WTE   | HC                  | WTE  |
| 2004          | N/A                             | N/A   | N/A                 | N/A  |
| 2006          | N/A                             | N/A   | N/A                 | N/A  |
| 2008          | 40                              | 32.92 | 5                   | 4.32 |
| 2010          | 39                              | 32.83 | 4                   | 2.52 |
| 2012          | 38                              | 31.35 | 4                   | 3.52 |

**Source:** Northern Health and Social Care Trust

**Notes:**

- 1 WTE = Whole-time Equivalent.
- 2 Figures for 2004 and 2006 are not available. Figures for 2008 are as at March and figures for 2010 and 2012 are as at January.

**Ministerial Cars and Drivers**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of departmental staff who have availed of ministerial cars and drivers in each of the last three years; (ii) the cost of providing the service; and (iii) whether the benefit derived is subject to income tax.

**(AQW 10296/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** The Department does not maintain detailed records of officials who use the Ministerial car. At all times, however, the car is used only for Departmental business.

During 2011/12 the cost to the Department of providing the service was £34,178. Prior to April 2011, DFP met the cost of the Ministerial car service.

The occasional use of the Ministerial car by officials provides good value for money for the Department, as it reduces the level of travel costs incurred by those officials. There are no income tax implications.

**Nursing Homes: Running Costs**

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the percentage increase in the running costs of nursing homes for elderly people in each of the last two years.

**(AQW 10317/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:** All nursing homes for elderly people in Northern Ireland are run by the independent sector. As such the Department does not have details of the costs of running these homes.

**Dental Screening: Schools**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) his Department's policy in relation to the screening of school children to collect data on oral health; (ii) what school screening was carried out in 2011/12 and who provided the service; and (iii) what programme of school screening is planned for 2012/13 including who will provide the service.

**(AQW 10326/11-15)**

**Mr Poots:**

- The DHSSPS discontinued routine school dental screening in 2008 following advice from the National Screening Committee (NSC) to the UK Chief Dental Officers that there is no evidence to support the continued population screening for dental disease among children aged 6-9 years. The Health and Social Care Board plan to pilot new arrangements to collect robust oral health data from school children and it is hoped to commence this pilot in autumn 2012.
- No school screening was carried out in 2011/12.
- The HSCB is planning a pilot programme in 2012/13 for the collection of oral health data from school children. It is proposed that the pilot programme will be undertaken by general dental practitioners contracted to the HSCB.

## Department of Justice

### Drivers: Fines for No Insurance

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 7874/11-15, on how many occasions in the last ten years a fine of £5000 has been imposed for driving without insurance; and, in the absence of a maximum fine being imposed during this time, what was the highest fine imposed.

**(AQW 8658/11-15)**

**Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice):** Uninsured driving is an offence under Article 90(4) of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981.

The table below gives the maximum fines imposed for the offence of using a motor vehicle without insurance for the calendar years 1999 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

#### Maximum fines for uninsured driving, 1999-2008

| Year | Size of maximum fine | Frequency of convictions |
|------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1999 | £2000                | 1                        |
| 2000 | £1500                | 1                        |
| 2001 | £1000                | 2                        |
| 2002 | £5000                | 1                        |
| 2003 | £800                 | 2                        |
| 2004 | £1000                | 5                        |
| 2005 | £5000                | 1                        |
| 2006 | £3505                | 1                        |
| 2007 | £1500                | 1                        |
| 2008 | £1000                | 9                        |

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 1999-2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

### HMP Maghaberry: Incident on 30 June 2011

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the incident in HMP Maghaberry on 30 June 2011 (i) what damage was caused; (ii) what was the cost of repairing the damage; (iii) in what section of the prison the incident occurred; (iv) whether any staff were injured; (v) how many prisoners were involved; and (vi) what action was taken against those involved.

**(AQW 9693/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Parts (i), (iv), (v) and (vi) were answered in AQW 4125/11-15. Part (ii) was answered in AQW 3777/11-15. (iii) Roe House.

### Badger Baiting

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister of Justice what action his Department is taking to combat badger baiting.

**(AQW 9777/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The most relevant statutory protection for badgers is contained in the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. In particular, Article 10 of the Order makes it an offence intentionally to kill, injure or take a badger. The maximum punishment for this summary offence is a level 5 fine (currently £5,000). Policy responsibility for the protection of wild animals does not lie with my Department, but the police have powers of enforcement under the Order. The exercise of these powers is an operational matter for the Chief Constable.

### Sex Offenders: Release from Prison

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether, as a matter of public protection, he will communicate to victims through the Department's agencies the reasons why sex offenders are being released from prison.

**(AQW 9792/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Sentenced offenders are released in line with statutory requirements.

A range of information on release dates and conditions is provided to those victims who register with the statutory victim information schemes run by the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and the Department of Justice.



### Prisoners: Release of Murderers/Sex Offenders

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the standard procedure that is followed when a prisoner convicted of murder or a sexual offence is being (i) prepared for release; and (ii) released; and whether such prisoners will remain on licence after they are released.

**(AQW 9794/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Following a prisoner's assessment and committal, a sentence plan is devised which sets out the work to be undertaken in custody to address offending behaviour and meet other needs. The prisoner would then be referred to appropriate interventions to assist them address their risk of re-offending and support their resettlement. Prior to release their risk of reoffending is assessed and plans developed for their release from custody. Where appropriate, cases are referred to the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland and/or to Local Area Public Protection Panel meetings.

In many cases individuals will be released on licence and supervised by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. The length of the licence period is dependent on the type of sentence imposed. Life sentence prisoners remain on licence for the rest of their lives.

### Prison Service Staff: Personal Protection

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice whether Prison Service staff will continue to receive firearms and security equipment for their homes for personal protection.

**(AQW 9808/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** It is not appropriate for me to comment on issues of personal protection.

### Prison Service: Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the decision process used to select the first officers to leave under the Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme.

**(AQW 9813/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** A Voluntary Early Retirement Panel, which included representatives from the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Justice ensured that individuals were released from NIPS in line with the criteria outlined in the Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme launch documentation. The criteria followed are:

- 1 the number of staff, as far as possible, to match the required reductions in the number of posts in that grade;
- 2 account to be taken of the NIPS operational requirements;
- 3 in the event of a greater number of eligible staff applying than can be released for each grade, selection to be made on a least cost basis.

During the selection process a number of staff at the Principal Officer and Main Grade Officer grades were identified as being of equal ranking in terms of cost and operational requirements. The VER Panel used a random selection process to determine which officers would leave on the 31 March 2012. This is in line with the Northern Ireland Civil Service procedures.

### Ewa Pietrzycka: Case Costs

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice for a breakdown of the costs associated with the case of Ewa Pietrzycka, who was acquitted of a charge of theft for goods totalling £10.18.

**(AQW 9852/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Final costs in the case of Ewa Pietrzycka are not yet known. A breakdown of the estimated costs associated with the case is set out in the table below.

| Cost Type                                 | Estimated Cost   |
|---|------------------|
| PPS Prosecution <sup>1</sup>              | £500.00          |
| PSNI Prosecution <sup>2</sup>             | £714.30          |
| Defence (Legal Aid Costs) <sup>3</sup>    | £7,140.00        |
| Court: Judiciary, Staff                   | £871.16          |
| Jury Costs                                | £201.89          |
| Facilities (e.g. Courtroom Accommodation) | £220.00          |
| <b>Total</b>                              | <b>£9,647.35</b> |

#### Notes:

- 1 The PPS does not hold records of total time spent preparing the case but the final cost of the case is unlikely to exceed £500.00.

- 2 These are the only identifiable PSNI costs and include the investigation of the offence, attendance at court and administrative costs.
- 3 As this case only concluded on 5 March, the claims for payment have just recently been submitted. As such, the final legal aid fees have not yet been assessed and paid.

### Sexual Offences Prevention Orders: Breaches

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how many cases involving alleged breaches of Sexual Offences Prevention Orders are currently in the (i) Magistrates'; and (ii) Crown Court systems, broken down by court division.

**(AQW 9853/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** As of 25 March 2012 there were 18 prosecutions for breach of a Sexual Offences Prevention Order before the courts. The table below details the breakdown by court tier and County Court Division.

| Court Tier            | Division            | Number of Cases |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| County Court (Appeal) | Craigavon           | 1               |
| Crown Court           | Antrim              | 2               |
|                       | Belfast             | 1               |
| Magistrates' Court    | Antrim              | 2               |
|                       | Ards                | 1               |
|                       | Armagh & South Down | 1               |
|                       | Belfast             | 4               |
|                       | Fermanagh & Tyrone  | 1               |
|                       | Londonderry         | 5               |
| <b>Total</b>          |                     | <b>18</b>       |

### Forensic Evidence: Delays

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how many Magistrates' Court cases, in each of the last five years, have been adjourned two or more times due to forensic evidence delays, broken down by court division.

**(AQW 9854/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The reasons for adjournments in the Magistrates' Court are not recorded in this level of detail and therefore information is not available to answer the question in the format sought.

However, an adjournment monitoring exercise is currently operating in Londonderry Magistrates' Court and records cases where the reason for an adjournment is that the case is 'Not Ready – Forensics'.

As of 29 February 2012 there were ten cases in Londonderry Magistrates' Court which were adjourned on two or more occasions for this reason. The table below sets out the breakdown by calendar year.

| Year <sup>[1]</sup>     | Number of cases adjourned on two or more occasions |
|-------------------------|--|
| 2010 <sup>[2]</sup>     | 1  |
| 2011                    | 8  |
| 2012 (up to 29.02.2012) | 1  |

[1] 2011 and 2012 figures are provisional

[2] Fully operational in late 2010

### Prisons: Contraband Items

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Justice to list every contraband item discovered in each prison facility in the past 12 months. **(AQW 9904/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** A list of contraband items discovered in the 12 months up to 29 February 2012 is set out in the tables at Annex A. The finds are grouped according to type. Many of the items confiscated are not prohibited items but were in excess of entitlements.

**ANNEX A**  
**MAGHABERRY**

| <b>Nature of Find</b>                    |     |
|--|-----|
| Alcohol                                  | 38  |
| Allen key                                | 0   |
| Blades/knives                            | 215 |
| CDs/DVDs/tapes/videos                    | 20  |
| Cash                                     | 5   |
| Cigarettes/lighters                      | 56  |
| Cleaning materials                       | 93  |
| Clothing                                 | 56  |
| Containers (such as empty water bottles) | 90  |
| Information technology equipment         | 14  |
| Documents/letters                        | 39  |
| Drug related items                       | 128 |
| Drugs/tablets                            | 227 |
| DVD player                               | 7   |
| Electrical wires/batteries               | 65  |
| Excess bedding/towels                    | 397 |
| Excess crockery/cutlery                  | 103 |
| Excess/broken furniture                  | 86  |
| Excess handicrafts                       | 192 |
| Excess rubbish                           | 226 |
| Food                                     | 88  |
| Furniture polish                         | 2   |
| Games console/digi box                   | 21  |
| Games console accessories                | 4   |
| Homemade tools                           | 229 |
| Improvised gym equipment                 | 106 |
| Improvised smoking device                | 55  |
| Inappropriate posters/material           | 28  |
| Make-up/toiletries/air fresheners        | 127 |
| Mirror/glass                             | 45  |
| Mobile phone/charger                     | 29  |
| Padlock/key                              | 6   |
| Photographs/pictures                     | 8   |
| Radio/stereo                             | 27  |
| Screwdriver                              | 5   |
| SIM card                                 | 2   |

| <b>Nature of Find</b>    |              |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| TV/TV aerial/remote      | 48           |
| Unknown substance/liquid | 30           |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>2,917</b> |

These figures relate to the number of finds rather than the quantity of items confiscated.

#### **MAGILLIGAN**

| <b>Nature of Find</b>                    |    |
|--|----|
| Alcohol                                  | 4  |
| Allen key                                | 1  |
| Blades/knives                            | 6  |
| CDs/DVDs/tapes/videos                    | 3  |
| Cash                                     | 2  |
| Cigarettes/lighters                      | 1  |
| Cleaning materials                       | 3  |
| Clothing                                 | 1  |
| Containers (such as empty water bottles) | 0  |
| Information technology equipment         | 2  |
| Documents/letters                        | 0  |
| Drug related items                       | 8  |
| Drugs/tablets                            | 34 |
| DVD player                               | 0  |
| Electrical wires/batteries               | 2  |
| Excess bedding/towels                    | 2  |
| Excess crockery/cutlery                  | 0  |
| Excess furniture                         | 0  |
| Excess handicrafts                       | 1  |
| Excess rubbish                           | 0  |
| Food                                     | 0  |
| Furniture polish                         | 1  |
| Games console/digi box                   | 7  |
| Games console accessories                | 0  |
| Homemade tools                           | 3  |
| Improvised gym equipment                 | 1  |
| Improvised smoking device                | 8  |
| Inappropriate posters/material           | 14 |
| Make-up/toiletries/air fresheners        | 1  |
| Mirror/glass                             | 0  |
| Mobile phone/charger                     | 31 |

| <b>Nature of Find</b>    |            |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Padlock/key              | 0          |
| Photographs/pictures     | 0          |
| Radio/stereo             | 7          |
| Screwdriver              | 2          |
| SIM card                 | 2          |
| TV/TV aerial/remote      | 7          |
| Unknown substance/liquid | 4          |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>158</b> |

These figures relate to the number of finds rather than the quantity of items confiscated.

#### **HYDEBANK WOOD**

| <b>Nature of Find</b>                    |    |
|--|----|
| Alcohol                                  | 3  |
| Allen key                                | 0  |
| Blades/knives                            | 17 |
| CDs/DVDs/tapes/videos                    | 7  |
| Cash                                     | 2  |
| Cigarettes/lighters                      | 38 |
| Cleaning materials                       | 15 |
| Clothing                                 | 3  |
| Containers (such as empty water bottles) | 0  |
| Information technology equipment         | 2  |
| Documents/letters                        | 2  |
| Drug related items                       | 63 |
| Drugs/tablets                            | 31 |
| DVD player                               | 0  |
| Electrical wires/batteries               | 12 |
| Excess bedding/towels                    | 19 |
| Excess crockery/cutlery                  | 14 |
| Excess furniture                         | 26 |
| Excess handicrafts                       | 41 |
| Excess rubbish                           | 35 |
| Food                                     | 7  |
| Furniture polish                         | 0  |
| Games console/digi box                   | 10 |
| Games console accessories                | 2  |
| Homemade tools                           | 50 |
| Improvised gym equipment                 | 0  |

| <b>Nature of Find</b>             |            |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Improvised smoking device         | 38         |
| Inappropriate posters/material    | 5          |
| Make-up/toiletries/air fresheners | 7          |
| Mirror/glass                      | 8          |
| Mobile phone/charger              | 2          |
| Padlock/key                       | 1          |
| Photographs/pictures              | 1          |
| Radio/stereo                      | 9          |
| Screwdriver                       | 1          |
| SIM card                          | 0          |
| TV/TV aerial/remote               | 15         |
| Unknown substance/liquid          | 6          |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>492</b> |

These figures relate to the number of finds rather than the quantity of items confiscated.

### **Cigarettes: Illegal Import**

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Justice how many prosecutions and convictions there have been for the sale or importing of illegal 'white' cigarettes in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 9911/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The information requested is not available from the Department of Justice's databases. Court conviction and sentencing datasets do not distinguish cigarette smuggling from other evasion of duty or intent to defraud offences which would be prosecuted under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 and/or the Criminal Attempts and Conspiracy (Northern Ireland) Order 1983.

HM Revenue & Customs has provided the following data on tobacco duty convictions. These convictions relate to all types of non UK duty paid tobacco products including cigarettes and hand rolling tobacco. It is not possible to identify the numbers of prosecutions brought nor is it possible to distinguish the brands or type of goods involved in each of these individual cases.

#### **Number of convictions for UK duty paid tobacco product offences by calendar year, 2006/07 – 2010/11**

| <b>Calendar year</b> | <b>Convictions</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| 2006/07              | 8                  |
| 2007/08              | 16                 |
| 2008/09              | 25                 |
| 2009/10              | 12                 |
| 2010/11              | 7                  |

### **Cigarettes: Illegal Import**

**Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Justice what action his Department has taken, in conjunction with the PSNI, to tackle the increasing prevalence of illegal 'white' cigarettes.

**(AQW 9912/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Tobacco fraud is primarily a matter for HMRC; however in 2009 at the Cross Border Organised Crime Seminar law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border formed a Cross Border Tobacco Fraud Enforcement Group. The aim of the group is to identify key criminal gangs involved in this activity and to use a partnership approach to ensure their disruption.

Members of the Enforcement group include representatives of HMRC, Revenue Commissioners, An Garda Síochána, PSNI, SOCA, UKBA and the Criminal Assets Bureau.

## Gerry McGeough

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3357/11-15, what action he intends to take to address the disparities in the matter.

**(AQW 9920/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** In AQW 3357/11 I provided an answer which clearly set out the conditions for this prisoner. This information is a matter of public record and I do not intend to take any further action.

## Pre-sentence Reports: 2011

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how many pre-sentence reports were ordered at (i) Magistrates Courts; and (ii) Crown Courts in 2011, broken down by court division.

**(AQW 9922/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The table below details the total number of court ordered pre-sentence reports ordered during calendar year 2011, broken down by court tier and County Court Division.

Table: Number of Pre-Sentence Reports Ordered in calendar year 2011

| Court Tier         | Division            | Total        |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Crown Court        | Antrim              | 174          |
|                    | Ards                | 166          |
|                    | Armagh & South Down | 126          |
|                    | Belfast             | 533          |
|                    | Craigavon           | 166          |
|                    | Fermanagh & Tyrone  | 158          |
|                    | Londonderry         | 144          |
| <b>Total</b>       |                     | <b>1,467</b> |
| Magistrates' Court | Antrim              | 655          |
|                    | Ards                | 865          |
|                    | Armagh & South Down | 302          |
|                    | Belfast             | 3,065        |
|                    | Craigavon           | 1,225        |
|                    | Fermanagh & Tyrone  | 1,155        |
|                    | Londonderry         | 772          |
| <b>Total</b>       |                     | <b>8,039</b> |

## Thomas Ward: Serious Case Review

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice (i) why Thomas Ward qualified as rehabilitated on release; (ii) why, in spite of assessments, he remained classed as a Category 3 sex offender; and (iii) whether he will order a Serious Case Review into this matter.

**(AQW 9924/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** I cannot comment on the detail of individual cases, but refer the Member to my answers to AQW 9695/11-15 and AQW 9331/11-15.

### Policing and Community Safety Partnerships: Costs

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of (i) restructuring the District Policing Partnerships; and (ii) recruiting independent members of the reformed Policing and Community Safety Partnerships.

**(AQW 9932/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:**

- (i) There is no cost directly attached to this reform, as activity and funding previously related to DPPs will now be transferred directly to PCSPs.
- (ii) The process of appointing independent members to Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) is a function of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. As the process is not yet complete, the final costs are not available.

### Prisoners: Drug Use

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9007/11-15, what quantity of the stated drugs were found and over what period of time.

**(AQW 9982/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Pursuant to AQW 9007/11-15 the tables below outline the quantities of drugs found for the period 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2011.

| <b>Maghaberry</b> | <b>No. of Finds</b> | <b>Amount</b>   |
|-------------------|---------------------|---|
| Amphetamines      | 2<br>4              | 20 tablets<br>unspecified   |
| Barbiturates      | 1                   | unspecified   |
| Benzodiazepines   | 4                   | 268   |
| Cannabinoid       | 27<br>22            | 93.39g<br>unspecified   |
| Cocaine           | 4                   | 20.8g   |
| Opiates           | 7<br>49             | 5.8g and 49 tablets   |
| Steroid           | 2<br>1              | 3 tablets<br>unspecified  |
| Non specified     | 1<br>2<br>1<br>86   | 23 excess paracetamol<br>16 seroquel<br>32 unspecified tablets<br>unspecified |

| <b>Magilligan</b> | <b>No. of Finds</b> | <b>Amount</b>                   |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Amphetamines      | 3                   | 329 tablets                     |
| Barbiturates      | 2                   | unspecified                     |
| Benzodiazepines   | 4                   | 251 tablets                     |
| Buprenorphine     | 2<br>1              | 56.5 tablets<br>unspecified     |
| Cannabinoid       | 13<br>12            | 97.8g<br>unspecified            |
| Cocaine           | 1<br>1              | 1.3g<br>unspecified             |
| Opiates           | 3<br>12<br>4        | 16.8g<br>Tablets<br>unspecified |
| Steroid           | 2                   | 115 tablets                     |



| <b>Magilligan</b> | <b>No. of Finds</b> | <b>Amount</b>  |
|-------------------|---------------------|--|
| Non specified     | 2<br>5<br>48        | 21 capsules<br>174 tablets/ a white paste<br>unspecified |

| <b>Hydebank</b> | <b>No. of Finds</b> | <b>Amount</b>            |
|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Amphetamines    | 1                   | unspecified              |
| Benzodiazepines | 1                   | 1 tablet                 |
| Cannabinoid     | 14                  | unspecified              |
| Cocaine         | 1                   | unspecified              |
| Steroid         | 2                   | unspecified              |
| Non specified   | 3<br>48             | 3 tablets<br>unspecified |

\* Non specified drugs – not identified at time of find.

\* Unspecified amounts – finds not counted or weighed.

### **Drugs: Legal Highs**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether he will introduce legislation to ban the sale, possession and supply of legal highs.

**(AQW 9983/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Under section 151 and Schedule 17 of the Policing and Social Responsibility Act 2011, legislative amendments were made to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 to introduce Temporary Class Drug Orders to tackle the issue of legal highs across the whole of the United Kingdom. These Orders, which commenced on 15th November 2011, temporarily ban, up to a maximum period of twelve months, any substance or product that was not already a classified substance under the Misuse of Drugs Act and any substance that could be misused and is having or is capable of having harmful effects.

Northern Ireland is subject to these regulations and it is my understanding that there is no need for separate legislation at this time.

### **Forensic Science NI: Average Analysis Times**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice what is the average time taken by Forensic Science NI to analyse evidence; and what case is currently waiting the longest within the system.

**(AQW 9984/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** It is not possible to provide an average time taken for the analysis of evidence as FSNI conducts a broad range of examinations and analyses across many different science specialisms. Many of the investigations are also bespoke and involve multiple sequential examinations on multiple exhibits.

The oldest case currently being analysed relates to an exhibit submitted to FSNI for drugs analysis on 6 July 2011. The case involves a new designer drug and FSNI is awaiting production by a national reference standard synthesis laboratory of a certified reference sample of the new substance in order to finalise the analysis and interpretation to evidential standards.

### **Prisoners: Deliberate Damage to Prisons**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9460/11-15, how many instances of deliberate damage have occurred in these facilities in the last five years; and how many criminal charges were brought as a result.

**(AQW 9985/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Table A below details the number of instances of deliberate damage which have occurred in each prison facility in the last five years.

**Table A**

|               | <b>2007</b> | <b>2008</b> | <b>2009</b> | <b>2010</b> | <b>2011</b> |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Maghaberry    | 86          | 53          | 70          | 208         | 197         |
| Magilligan    | 6           | 15          | 22          | 12          | 26          |
| Hydebank Wood | 45          | 89          | 101         | 142         | 190         |

Woodlands does not hold separate records regarding deliberate damage caused by a child. The majority of work would be deemed as operational routine maintenance.

There have been a total of 50 crimes reported to the police over the past five years regarding damage caused at each prison facility.

Table B below shows the progress to date in investigating and prosecuting individuals for these offences:

**Table B**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Persons convicted   | 1  |
| Persons charged   | 3  |
| Reported to PPS – decision pending                                      | 12 |
| Reported to PPS – summons issued  | 11 |
| Reported to PPS – no prosecution decision returned                      | 2  |
| Investigation ongoing   | 6  |
| Investigation filed pending further evidence                            | 1  |
| Investigated – no persons made amenable                                 | 9  |
| Prison declined to make statement/dealing with through internal process | 5  |

Woodlands may report incidents of criminal damage to the PSNI when deemed necessary. There have been five reported incidents since 2007.

### Juvenile Court Cases

**Lord Morrow** asked Minister of Justice how many cases involving juveniles are currently in the (i) Magistrates'; and (ii) Crown Court systems, broken down by court division.

**(AQW 9986/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** As of 26 March 2012 1,018 cases involving 1,022 youth defendants were in the court system. The table below details the breakdown by court tier and County Court division.

| County Court Division | Crown Court | Magistrates' Court | Totals      |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Antrim                | 3           | 112                | 115         |
| Ards                  | 6           | 146                | 152         |
| Armagh & South Down   | 2           | 76                 | 78          |
| Belfast               | 7           | 332                | 339         |
| Craigavon             | 0           | 121                | 121         |
| Fermanagh & Tyrone    | 5           | 138                | 143         |
| Londonderry           | 0           | 70                 | 70          |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>23</b>   | <b>995</b>         | <b>1018</b> |

**Notes:**

- 1 Data is extracted from a live operational database and will change on a daily basis.
- 2 Data includes cases where a youth defendant is charged with an adult

For the purposes of this question, a youth defendant is defined as a defendant under the age of eighteen years.

### Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice when he intends to consult on the amendments to the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004, particularly in regard to Sections 104 and 105.

**(AQW 9994/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** A consultation document on proposals to vary firearms licensing fees and on a limited number of miscellaneous amendments to the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 is currently being finalised. There are ongoing exchanges on the fees

element with PSNI and the Department of Finance and Personnel consultant. When a final draft of the document is available, comments will be invited from the Justice Committee and, subject to those comments, a public consultation will follow.

### **Prisons: Offensive Weapons**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8930/11-15, (i) how many prisoners did this involve in each facility; (ii) how many were charged with criminal offences; and (iii) how each case was handled.

**(AQW 10024/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Possession of unauthorised or prohibited articles would ordinarily be dealt with as a breach of Prison Rules. The information requested is not available without an individual check on each adjudication record for offences under Prison Rule 38 (12) Possession of Unauthorised Articles. Not all finds have occurred in circumstances where a prisoner can be made amenable.

There is no cross referencing of finds with charges dealt with under prison rules or referred to the police.

### **Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice from which bodies, individuals, consultative or representative groups his Department is awaiting feed back before a public consultation is launched on the proposals to amend the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004, specifically in regard to Sections 104 and 105.

**(AQW 10026/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** A consultation document on proposals to vary firearms licensing fees and on a limited number of miscellaneous amendments to the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 is currently being finalised. There are ongoing exchanges on the fees element with PSNI and the Department of Finance and Personnel consultant. When a final draft of the document is available, comments will be invited from the Justice Committee and, subject to those comments, a public consultation will follow.

### **Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister of Justice whether there is any legislative or other reason for not proceeding with a public consultation on the proposals to amend the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004, specifically in regard to sections 104 and 105.

**(AQW 10027/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** A consultation document on proposals to vary firearms licensing fees and on a limited number of miscellaneous amendments to the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 is currently being finalised. There are ongoing exchanges on the fees element with PSNI and the Department of Finance and Personnel consultant. When a final draft of the document is available, comments will be invited from the Justice Committee and, subject to those comments, a public consultation will follow.

### **Prison Service Staff: Inmate Complaints**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8928/11-15, for his assessment of why the number of complaints against Prison Service officers rose from 382 in 2010 to 665 in 2011.

**(AQW 10028/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The complaints procedure was changed in 2010 to ensure that all complaints were recorded on the prison service Prison Record Information and System Management (PRISM) database. This includes verbal as well as written complaints. Previously many of these would have been resolved informally without being recorded.

The change in the complaints procedure was accompanied by additional training for staff and management, including use of PRISM. The change was also communicated to prisoners.

### **Police Injury Award Arrangements: Review**

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Justice what was the outcome of the Review of Police Injury Award Arrangements which was to be undertaken after June 2010.

**(AQW 10043/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Panel responsible for conducting the Review of the Police Injury Award Arrangements issued an interim report in June 2010. The final report, which issued on 30 September 2010, included 17 recommendations for improving the injury on duty award process. A copy of the report is available on the Department's website.

The average appeal processing time at the time of the Review was 62 weeks.

Since June 2010 the average processing time has been reduced to 24 weeks.

### Gerry McGeough: Legal Aid

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9334/11-15, for a breakdown of the £8034.78 paid from legal aid on disbursements.

**(AQW 10053/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The amounts paid in disbursements at the Crown Court total £6,851.67 and are detailed as follows:

|                     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Cardiologist report | £350.00         |
| Cardiologist report | £400.00         |
| Hospital Notes      | £30.00          |
| GP report           | £60.00          |
| Law searcher        | £5250.00        |
| Translation         | £761.67         |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>£6851.67</b> |

The amounts paid in respect of the Judicial Review total £660.65 and are detailed as follows:

|                 |                |
|-----------------|----------------|
| Stamp Duty      | £598.65        |
| Copy Order      | £10.00         |
| Ex parte Docket | £52.00         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>£660.65</b> |

Disbursements were paid under the Green Form Scheme in relation to advice and assistance provided in relation to the Court of Appeal as follows:

Copy transcript of original trial - £419.64

In addition mileage paid under The Green Form Scheme (PACE) is treated as a disbursement. The amount paid in respect of mileage was £102.82.

### Gerry McGeough: Dirty Protest

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether prisoner Gerry McGeough is on protest; and if so, when his protest began and what is the nature and manner of his protest.

**(AQW 10054/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Gerry McGeough is not currently engaged in the “dirty protest” that is being staged by a number of separated prisoners in Roe House, Maghaberry Prison.

### Human Trafficking: Prevention/Prosecution

**Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Justice what his Department is doing to assist in the prevention of human trafficking, the protection of victims and survivors and prosecution of the perpetrators of this crime.

**(AQW 10081/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The OCTF, which I chair, has an Immigration and Human Trafficking sub group which brings together a range of organisations, including representatives from the Department of Justice, to work in partnership to identify opportunities to arrest, disrupt and seek prosecution of traffickers.

A number of initiatives have either been taken or are in train. For instance, I launched the “Blue Blindfold” campaign last year to raise awareness of human trafficking. The OCTF has also produced a leaflet for potential victims, “Visitor or Victim?” Opportunities are taken to raise awareness by attendance at conferences and other events on human trafficking. For example, a police representative and I spoke at an event, “Beautiful Slave” in Bangor on 29 March.

The OCTF is also taking forward an initiative called “Changing the Mindset” which is a research project seeking to identify ways in which the OCTF can better engage with the public to raise awareness of organised crime, including human trafficking. In addition, I will be consulting shortly on proposed offences concerning trafficking to ensure that Northern Ireland is compliant with the EU Directive on Human Trafficking. This consultation document will also invite comments on how the Department might better engage with non-governmental bodies on the topic.

My Department funds a comprehensive support package for adult victims of human trafficking, currently delivered by Migrant Helpline and Women’s Aid, and is working with DHSSPS, Amnesty International and the Law Centre on a guide for frontline health service staff who engage with adult victims of human trafficking.

### Gerry McGeough: Legal Aid

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9334/11-15, whether the total amount paid includes solicitor and counsel expenses; and how much was claimed on (i) mileage; and (ii) travel time.

**(AQW 10084/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The total amount stated in AQW 9334/11-15 included payments made to solicitor and counsel.

The amounts paid in respect of travel and mileage are detailed below:

Representation provided under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act:

Mileage            £102.82 (No VAT payable)

Travel Time       £279.24 (excluding VAT).

Fees paid to the solicitor for representation at the Magistrates' Court include:

Mileage            £323.82 (excluding VAT)

Travel Time       £744.58 (excluding VAT).

Fees paid to the solicitor for representation at the Crown Court include:

Mileage            £80.68 (excluding VAT)

Travel time       £622.07 (excluding VAT).

No fees have been paid to the Senior or Junior Counsel in respect of travel or mileage for the Crown Court proceedings.

Under the Civil Legal Aid Scheme mileage and travel time were paid to the solicitor in respect and the breakdown is as follows:

Mileage            £15.71 (excluding VAT)

Travel time       £110.25 (excluding VAT).

### Youth Offenders: Day Release

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the procedure to monitor convicted youth offenders whilst they are on day release; and what management exists to ensure that (i) release terms are adhered to; and (ii) no further offences are committed.

**(AQW 10086/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The power to grant leave (and to attach conditions) rests with the Director of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre in accordance with Schedule 2 Article 4 of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.

Home leave and other absences from the Centre are granted in accordance with policies and procedure for home leave and mobility. Each episode of home leave or mobility, except in the case of emergency medical treatment, is planned and agreed in advance with partner agencies such as PBNI and PSNI as part of a programme to re-integrate and rehabilitate the young person.

Home leave can either be escorted or unescorted and a contract is agreed in advance with the young person and their parents or carers. The amount of contact will vary depending on the risk assessment that is undertaken and the stage in their sentence. Consideration will also be given to the young person's behaviour whilst in custody and on previous home leave if any. Most home leave will involve meetings with Youth Justice Agency and/or PBNI staff, and involve contact with the young person and their parents or carers during their period of absence from the Centre.

### Prisoners: Drug Use

**Lord Morrow** asked Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9007/11-15, (i) how many prisoners did this involve in each facility; (ii) how many were charged with criminal offences; and (iii) how each case was handled.

**(AQW 10087/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Possession of drugs in prison would ordinarily be dealt with as a breach of Prison Rules unless the quantities involved were such that a charge of Possession with Intent to Supply was warranted. The information requested is not available without an individual check on each adjudication record for offences under Prison Rule 38 (12) Possession of Unauthorised Articles. Not all drugs finds have occurred in circumstances where a prisoner can be made amenable. There is no cross referencing of finds with charges dealt with under prison rules or referred to the police.

### Prisons: Full-body Imaging

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Justice when the pilot scheme using full body imaging scanners in Maghaberry Prison will begin.  
**(AQW 10088/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** In my statement to the Assembly on 26 March I made clear my intention to initiate a pilot of Full Body Imaging Scanners, as soon as the necessary authorisation for use of this technology in prisons is obtained.

I am not yet in a position to be definitive about the detail of the pilot.

### Capital/Revenue Costs: Departmental Spend

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Justice for an estimate of the annual additional cost to his Department of providing its services in our divided society, broken down by (i) capital; and (ii) revenue costs.

**(AQW 10094/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** At my request there is an ongoing exercise within the Department of Justice to identify and quantify the costs incurred within the Department's expenditure as a result of divisions. I will not be in a position to answer this question until that exercise has been completed, at which time I will write to the Member.

### Airport Constables

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Justice how many airport police constabulary officers have been employed in the (i) Belfast International Airport; (ii) George Best Belfast City Airport; and (iii) City of Derry Airport in each of the last five financial years.

**(AQW 10129/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Airport constables are employed at Belfast International Airport only. Article 19 of the Airports (Northern Ireland) Order provides that they are appointed by and are under the exclusive control of the private airport operator. The number of those employed is not routinely held by the Department. The PSNI has primacy for policing throughout Northern Ireland including the airports at Belfast International, Belfast City and the City of Derry.

### Airport Constables: Belfast International Airport

**Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the security implications and the repercussions for PSNI resources as a result of the reported compulsory redundancies of 8 of the 21 Airport Constabulary Officers based at Belfast International Airport.

**(AQW 10131/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Security arrangements and risk assessments are continually reviewed by airport management in conjunction with the PSNI and other key partners in line with a UK-wide framework. Any implications for policing by the Police Service of Northern Ireland at Belfast International Airport are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

### Prisoners: Political Prisoner Classification

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether the term 'political prisoner' is recognised by his Department and the Prison Service; whether all prisoners are treated the same regardless of their perception regarding status.

**(AQW 10164/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Neither my department nor the Prison Service recognises the term "political prisoner". There is no such prisoner classification. There are however offenders in prison who claim to be politically motivated. Prisoners in Northern Ireland are treated equally according to the rules and procedures that apply to them.

### Human Trafficking: Cannabis Factories

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how many people convicted of operating cannabis factories over the last five years have been found to be victims of human trafficking.

**(AQW 10165/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The Department of Justice came into existence on 12 April 2010. Statistics on the number of people convicted of operating cannabis factories who have been found to be victims of human trafficking before that date are a matter for the previous department.

The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) has confirmed that the status of a suspect of this offence as a victim of human trafficking is not held in a form that enables statistics to be gathered. If a prosecutor considers that a defendant is the victim of human trafficking and therefore takes a decision not to prosecute in the Public Interest then a note to that effect is held on the file. The PPS is developing a policy which will include guidance for prosecutors on how to make decisions in relation to possible offences committed by those who have been trafficked. The draft policy states that the PPS will consider each case on its own merits and having regard to the seriousness of the offence committed. The policy further states that evidence or information to support the fact that the suspect has been trafficked and has committed the offence whilst in a coerced situation, will be considered as a strong public interest factor mitigating against prosecution.

### Barry Boardman/Francis Peter Carleton: Legal Aid

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice how much has been paid in legal aid in the cases of Barry Boardman and Francis Peter Carleton; and what is the estimated final total.

**(AQW 10166/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** To date, a total of £19,840.70 has been paid to the solicitors representing the defendants in the Magistrates' Court.

The case has been listed for hearing in the Crown Court and both defendants have pleaded not guilty. It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the final cost of the Crown Court trial at this time.

### **Prisoners: Day Release**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9145/11-15, to outline the nature of the reporting restrictions that are in place and how they relate to specific charges against juveniles rather than the protection of individual identities.

**(AQW 10167/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** Article 22 of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 sets out the restrictions on the reporting of criminal proceedings against children. Section (a) of Article 22 of the Order requires that

*“no report shall be published which reveals the name, address or school of the child or includes particulars likely to lead to the identification of the child”.*

Further reporting restrictions may be imposed by a Court depending on the nature of the alleged offence and/or for the protection of the identity of the defendant, the injured party or vulnerable witnesses.

### **Hydebank Wood: New Facility**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Justice to outline his plans for a new women’s facility at Hydebank Wood; and what sites in Hydebank are available for such a facility.

**(AQW 10172/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** I plan to publish an Outline Estate Strategy for the Northern Ireland Prison Service later this month. As that strategy has not yet been finalised I do not think it is appropriate for me to pre-empt its conclusions although I intend that the strategy will address the issue of a new facility for women offenders.

It is also my intention that the outline strategy will be subject to public consultation.

### **Courthouse Closures: Service Users**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice what is the average weekly number of service users at each of the courthouses which are under consultation for proposed closure, including staff, legal representatives, defendants, witnesses, probation officers, the PSNI and the press.

**(AQW 10228/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The NI Courts & Tribunals Service does not routinely collect data on the number of court users that attend Hearing Centres. However, the average number of cases listed each week during 2011 in the five Hearing Centres was:

|             |    |
|-------------|----|
| Bangor      | 97 |
| Larne       | 44 |
| Limavady    | 66 |
| Magherafelt | 76 |
| Strabane    | 69 |

All defendants or parties listed may not appear at the court hearing and a legal representative may appear for one or more cases on a list.

Information for the Magherafelt and Strabane exit surveys was collected over a period of seven hearing days at each courthouse. During this period 88 court users were surveyed in Magherafelt and 74 in Strabane.

### **Marian Price: Cell and Exercise Area**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice for what purpose is Marian Price’s cell and exercise area at Maghaberry Prison, which cost £2,257 to refurbish, being used.

**(AQW 10229/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The cell is occupied by another prisoner and the exercise area is being used by those prisoners now resident in Glenn House.

### **Magherafelt/Strabane Magistrates’ Courts: Exit Surveys**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8726/11-15, over how many days the exit surveys were carried out at (i) Magherafelt; and (ii) Strabane Magistrates Courts.

**(AQW 10230/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** The NI Courts & Tribunals Service does not routinely collect data on the number of court users that attend Hearing Centres. However, the average number of cases listed each week during 2011 in the five Hearing Centres was:

|             |    |
|-------------|----|
| Bangor      | 97 |
| Larne       | 44 |
| Limavady    | 66 |
| Magherafelt | 76 |
| Strabane    | 69 |

All defendants or parties listed may not appear at the court hearing and a legal representative may appear for one or more cases on a list.

Information for the Magherafelt and Strabane exit surveys was collected over a period of seven hearing days at each courthouse. During this period 88 court users were surveyed in Magherafelt and 74 in Strabane.

### Human Trafficking: Legislation

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of Justice whether he plans a public consultation on the issue of human trafficking; and to outline a timescale for introducing legislation on this matter.

**(AQW 10285/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** I launched a public consultation on 5 April on two aspects concerning human trafficking. First the document invites comments on legislative amendments involving new offences which are required to ensure Northern Ireland is compliant with the EU Directive on Human Trafficking. It also invites comments on how the Department of Justice can engage better with non-government and other organisations on human trafficking issues. I plan to include the legislation amendments in the upcoming Justice Bill, which will be introduced after the Assembly's summer recess this year.

### Legal Aid: Personal Information

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Justice which recipients of legal aid payments endeavoured to prevent the release of such information by the NI Legal Services Commission.

**(AQW 10303/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** In advance of the annual publication of the top 100 fee earners, and in compliance with its responsibilities under the Data Protection Act, the Commission notifies the Law Society, the Bar Council, individual practitioners and firms of the information that it intends to publish.

Under the Data Protection Act individuals may raise issues in respect of the publication of personal information. The process relating to issues raised by one individual have not been finalised and that person's name could not be included in the published list.

### HMP Maghaberry: Full-body Imaging

**Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Justice when the pilot scheme to use full-body imaging scanners will commence in HMP Maghaberry; and for a breakdown of the estimated costs of this initiative.

**(AQW 10321/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** In my statement to the Assembly on 26 March I made clear my intention to initiate a pilot of Full Body Imaging Scanners, as soon as the necessary authorisation for use of this technology in prisons is obtained.

I am not yet in a position to be definitive about the detail of the pilot.

### Rural Crimes

**Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of how rural crimes are currently categorised; and whether he has any plans to review the categorisation.

**(AQW 10327/11-15)**

**Mr Ford:** How rural crimes are currently categorised is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.



## Department for Regional Development

### Traffic: Saintfield/Crossgar Road

**Mr McNarry** asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures are planned to ease traffic pressures, particularly at peak times, between the Belfast side of Saintfield and the Crossgar Road; and whether any additional measures are planned. (AQW 9745/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is aware of the congestion problems at the junction of Main Street/Crossgar Road/Killyleagh Road, Saintfield, especially during peak hours. This junction is controlled by traffic signals and I understand that these signals have now been set to optimise the throughput of vehicular traffic, especially during peak hours.

This recent adjustment to the traffic signals has alleviated the congestion of traffic on Main Street and increased safety for right turning vehicles from the Killyleagh Road.

With regard to a by-pass of Saintfield, in the current financial climate of reduced budgets and other competing schemes, a by-pass for Saintfield would not feature highly on a priority list and be highly unlikely to proceed in the foreseeable future. Should budgetary constraints change in the future, then I am happy to review this issue.

### A5: Compensation for Farmers

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister for Regional Development how he will ensure that all farmers who are forced to sell land to accommodate the proposed A5 will be fairly compensated. (AQW 9935/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** When my Department acquires land compulsorily for proposed road schemes, it does so under the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 and the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

All landowners affected as a direct consequence of the vesting order to accommodate the proposed A5 scheme will be entitled to compensation for any land taken, for losses to retained land due to severance and injurious affection and to costs incurred. Claims for compensation will be independently assessed by the District Valuer within the Department of Finance and Personnel's Land & Property Services. In the event that agreement cannot be reached, the matter may be referred to the Lands Tribunal for Northern Ireland for determination.

### CPR: Staff Training

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Regional Development what strategy is in place to train staff (i) in his Department; and (ii) who work on public transport in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation. (AQW 10016/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department complies with the requirements of the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1982 (as amended) by ensuring that an appropriate proportion of its staff receive first aid training which incorporates instruction in providing Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

Similarly, Translink complies with the 1982 Regulations by providing training in first aid, including Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation. Translink also has a small number of volunteer staff trained in the use of defibrillators, which are provided at main Translink locations across Northern Ireland.

### Gritting Schedule: Traffic Volume

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 7945/11-15, why five roads with traffic volume of less than 1,000 vehicles per day were added to the gritting schedule. (AQW 10025/11-15)

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the roads were added to the gritted schedule under the remote settlement criteria, that is, small settlements in rural areas containing 100 dwellings or more, which have no salted links to roads on the main salted network. The five roads are:-

- Tirkeeran Road and Glen Road, Garvagh;
- Gortnaghey Road, Limavady;
- Brankinstown Road, Aghalee; and
- Blackskull Road, Donaghcloney.

### **Bonds: Roads Service**

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether any of the bonds presented to his Department are now under the ownership or care of the National Asset Management Agency or any of the banks.

**(AQW 10029/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that although it is aware that the National Asset Management Agency may have taken over ownership of a number of development sites, the bonds will remain with the original bondsman/surety.

With regard to bonds held by banks, this form of surety is the most common method used by developers, and bonds are currently in place with the following banks:-

- AIB Group (UK) PLC T/A First Trust Bank
- Anglo Irish Bank Corporation PLC
- Bank of Scotland (Ireland) Ltd
- First Trust Bank
- Northern Bank Ltd
- The Governor & Company of the Bank of Ireland
- Ulster Bank Ltd
- Allied Irish Banks PLC (Dublin)
- Alliance and Leicester
- Bank of Ireland – Dublin
- Bank of Ireland – Belfast
- Bank of Scotland PLC
- Barclays Bank PLC
- Equity Bank
- HSBC Bank PLC
- Irish Intercontinental Investment Bank
- Lombard & Ulster Ltd
- National Westminster Bank PLC
- Hermes Kreditversicherungs AG

### **Bonds: Interest Accrual**

**Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the £112.5 million in bond money, which is currently held by his Department, includes money owed in interest on the original bonds; and whether his Department now owns the money generated in interest.

**(AQW 10030/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I should explain that the vast majority of bond monies are sums which are secured by means of guarantee bonds. As such, they do not accrue interest, since no money actually passes to my Department unless the bond is required to complete works within a development. Where the bond is called upon, only the amount required to pay for the necessary works is claimed, so no interest applies.

In the relatively small number of instances where a cash bond is lodged with my Department, simple interest at the appropriate rate is calculated and paid to the developer along with the bond refund, if and when the relevant development roads are satisfactorily completed and the bond is no longer required.

### **Bus Shelters: North Down**

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the locations of the new bus shelters proposed for the North Down area in 2012/13.

**(AQW 10034/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it currently has no plans to provide new bus shelters for the North Down Area in 2012/13.

### **Papers for Assembly Committees**

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all occasions in the last 12 months when his Department has made a presentation to an Assembly committee and provided papers pertaining to that presentation to the committee less than 48 hours beforehand.

**(AQW 10037/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** Since 25 May 2011 my officials have made 43 presentations to the Committee for Regional Development. Records show that some papers relating to three of these topics were tabled less than 48 hours beforehand. Details are set out in the table below.

| Date of Presentation | Issue   | Reason for Delay  |
|----------------------|---|---|
| 8 June 2011          | Rail Closures on the Arterial Network           | Late request for oral briefing received from the Committee resulted in papers being tabled on the day.        |
| 8 February 2012      | Belfast Rapid Transit – Outcome of consultation | Proximity to closing date of consultation led to some additional information being provided the day before.   |
| 14 March 2012        | ECar Project                                    | Written briefing provided as usual within 5 working days. Additional presentation material tabled on the day. |

### Buses: No 76 Metro Service

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the recent withdrawal of the No 76 Metro service; and whether his Department would consider advocating amendments to other existing routes to include additional stops in the Newtownbreda Road area, given the number of older residents who availed of the former service.

**(AQW 10056/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** The provision of individual Metro bus services is an operational matter for Translink. Translink has advised me that the number 76 Metro service was previously supported by developer contributions, which have come to an end. Translink have analysed average passenger usage on services between Carryduff and Tesco (Newtownbreda) and is of the opinion that such low patronage cannot justify continuation of the service or diversion of existing services. Translink is obligated to balance cost and service provision and in this case the service appears to be carrying, on average, less than 2 passengers per trip.

Detail of passenger usage is detailed in the table below:

| Month        | Operational Days | Total Passengers | Average Passengers Per Day | Average Passengers Per Trip |
|--------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Oct-11       | 21               | 1,064            | 50.7                       | 1.9                         |
| Nov-11       | 22               | 994              | 45.2                       | 1.7                         |
| Dec-11       | 20               | 879              | 44.0                       | 1.7                         |
| Jan-12       | 21               | 818              | 39.0                       | 1.5                         |
| Feb-12       | 18               | 786              | 43.7                       | 1.7                         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>102</b>       | <b>4,541</b>     | <b>44.5</b>                | <b>1.7</b>                  |

### Houses in Multiple Occupation: Traffic and Parking Assessments

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Roads Service can give consideration to the number of unregistered Houses of Multiple Occupancy in an area, when conducting traffic and parking assessments in relation to planning applications.

**(AQW 10058/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that when considering traffic and parking assessments in relation to planning applications, it would not be aware of any properties in the area that would be unregistered Houses in Multiple Occupancy.

### Houses in Multiple Occupation: Parking Problems

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the impact of Houses of Multiple Occupancy upon on-street parking and traffic levels in South Belfast.

**(AQW 10059/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** In many areas of inner South Belfast where there is a high concentration of private renting and Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMO), residents compete for parking with commuters during the day and those availing of the area's social amenities in the evenings. In such areas, the demand for parking frequently exceeds the capacity. This is an inconvenience for local residents and can detract from the amenity of an area. Illegal parking also poses a constraint to those providing local services.

DOE Planning Division's HMO Draft Plan included a recommendation that consideration is given to the introduction of Residents' Parking Permit Schemes in the HMO Policy Areas located in South Belfast. Roads Service is actively working on the introduction of Residents' Parking Permit Schemes in a number of locations in the inner South Belfast area.

The Member will be aware that previous attempts by Roads Service to introduce residents' parking schemes in the inner city areas of Belfast were met with considerable opposition.

Having made further changes to the policy, Roads Service now plans to concentrate its immediate efforts on the Stranmillis and Lower Malone schemes, which are the most advanced, in terms of consultation and local agreement on their design and proceed to the local consultation stage in the near future. The final decision on implementation of any scheme will ultimately depend on the successful completion of the legal process, which can take 6 to 12 months, and the availability of finance at that time.

The future development and introduction of schemes in other areas, such as Donegall Pass, Sandy Row and the Holylands will depend, to a degree, on the community's response and acceptance of those schemes, and will also be subject to the availability of staff and budget resources at that time.

### Houses in Multiple Occupation: Parking Problems

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Regional Development what his Department can do to address parking problems exacerbated by increasing numbers of both registered and unregistered Houses of Multiple Occupancy.

**(AQW 10060/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I would refer the Member to my answer to her Assembly Question, AQW 10059/11-15.

### Traffic and Parking Assessments: Garages

**Ms Lo** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether integrated garages can be disregarded by Roads Service, when conducting traffic and parking assessments in relation to planning applications, given that these spaces are often used for storage rather than parking.

**(AQW 10061/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** I can advise that the DOE/DRD document "Creating Places – Achieving Quality in Residential Developments" provides guidance on the requirements for parking in residential developments. The document states that garages will only be counted towards the in-curtilage provision, where they are large enough to both accommodate cars and make provision for general storage, or alternatively, provision for general storage can be made elsewhere within the curtilage. It also states that for garages, the preferred location for the storage space will be down one side of the garage (to make it accessible without the car having to be moved). In this case, the minimum internal width needs to be 4.0m for single garages, and 6.2m for double garages.

I can confirm, therefore, that in assessing parking provision for residential planning applications, my Department's Roads Service is guided by the above criteria.

### Roads: Southern Relief Road, Newry

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the delivery of a Southern Relief Road, Newry.

**(AQW 10095/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is undertaking further environmental and engineering assessments in relation to the Newry Southern Relief Road proposal, including an Article 6 assessment under the terms of the EU Habitats Directive, in relation to this proposal.

Roads Service officials indicate that this work, which will also assist in the identification of a preferred corridor for the scheme, is continuing and is expected to be completed during mid/late 2012.

### Roads: Southern Relief Road, Newry

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on consultants and associated personnel in relation to the development of the Southern Relief Road, Newry, in each of the last ten years.

**(AQW 10096/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the costs for consultants and associated personnel relating to the development of the Newry Southern Relief Road, over the last ten years, are detailed in the table below:

#### Costs of consultants and associated personnel in relation to the development of the Newry Southern Relief Road

| Year              | Cost        |
|-------------------|-------------|
| 2002/03 – 2005/06 | nil         |
| 2006/07           | £57,968.95  |
| 2007/08           | £371,320.12 |

| Year         | Cost               |
|--------------|--------------------|
| 2008/09      | £328,804.21        |
| 2009/10      | £51,783.86         |
| 2010/11      | £58,703.48         |
| 2011/12      | £59,670.52         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>£928,251.14</b> |

### Roads: Southern Relief Road, Newry

**Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the timescale for the public consultation and implementation of the Southern Relief Road scheme in Newry.

**(AQW 10097/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** The Newry Southern Relief Road scheme was included in the “Expanding the Strategic Road Improvement programme 2015” consultation document published in 2006. It was listed under “schemes that performed well in the assessment but not affordable within ISNI funding envisaged to 2015”. There was also a commitment that proposed measures would be developed and costed in a feasibility study.

I have welcomed the positive findings of the subsequent feasibility report in relation to the transport benefits that a new road linking from the A2 Warrenpoint dual carriageway to the A1 Belfast/Dublin Key Transport Corridor may be expected to provide, including the removal of some through traffic from the city centre road network and improved access to Warrenpoint Port.

Recently, the position in relation to affordability has not improved during the intervening period. In these circumstances, I am unable to outline a timescale for public consultation and implementation of the scheme.

The timing will be dependent on a number of factors, including the development process and statutory procedures, which includes formal public consultation, as well as the priority which the scheme attracts when compared to other competing demands, and the availability of the necessary finance.

In the meantime, particular environmental and engineering challenges that have been identified are being investigated, and I am advised that this work will also assist in the identification of a preferred corridor for this scheme.

### Roads: Resurfacing Spend

**Mr Storey** asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on road resurfacing in each of the last five years, broken down by district council area.

**(AQW 10104/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department’s Roads Service does not maintain an analysis of its spend in the format requested, however, it does hold an analysis of its total Structural Maintenance spend which includes Resurfacing, Surface Dressing and Structural Drainage.

Details of its total Structural Maintenance spend in each Council area during the last five years, are set out in the table below:

#### Roads Service Structural Maintenance Expenditure from 2006/2007 to 2010/2011

| District Council Area          | Structural Maintenance £'000 |           |           |           |           |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                                | 2006/2007                    | 2007/2008 | 2008/2009 | 2009/2010 | 2010/2011 |
| Antrim Borough Council         | 1,740                        | 2,096     | 1,742     | 2,794     | 2,463     |
| Ards Borough Council           | 2,118                        | 3,335     | 1,726     | 3,065     | 4,088     |
| Armagh City & District Council | 3,661                        | 4,907     | 4,439     | 5,388     | 5,229     |
| Ballymena Borough Council      | 2,471                        | 2,749     | 2,654     | 3,339     | 3,097     |
| Ballymoney Borough Council     | 1,433                        | 1,648     | 1,463     | 2,002     | 2,029     |
| Banbridge District Council     | 2,222                        | 2,734     | 1,880     | 2,811     | 3,572     |
| Belfast City Council           | 4,946                        | 6,009     | 4,630     | 6,039     | 5,527     |
| Carrickfergus Borough Council  | 934                          | 1,186     | 783       | 1,036     | 778       |
| Castlereagh Borough Council    | 1,842                        | 2,165     | 1,623     | 1,792     | 1,218     |
| Coleraine Borough Council      | 2,317                        | 2,597     | 1,862     | 2,736     | 2,373     |

| District Council Area             | Structural Maintenance £'000 |               |               |               |               |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|                                   | 2006/2007                    | 2007/2008     | 2008/2009     | 2009/2010     | 2010/2011     |
| Cookstown District County Council | 1,980                        | 1,976         | 1,738         | 2,145         | 2,718         |
| Craigavon Borough Council         | 2,948                        | 3,614         | 2,231         | 3,867         | 4,809         |
| Derry City Council                | 2,510                        | 2,998         | 2,673         | 3,086         | 2,887         |
| Down District Council             | 2,794                        | 2,552         | 3,336         | 3,377         | 4,065         |
| Dungannon District Council        | 3,911                        | 4,051         | 3,410         | 4,498         | 5,078         |
| Fermanagh District Council        | 4,522                        | 4,578         | 4,638         | 4,951         | 6,869         |
| Larne Borough Council             | 2,180                        | 1,273         | 1,116         | 1,704         | 1,380         |
| Limavady Borough Council          | 1,561                        | 2,391         | 1,558         | 2,344         | 2,303         |
| Lisburn Borough Council           | 3,077                        | 3,066         | 4,364         | 4,604         | 5,411         |
| Magherafelt District Council      | 1,755                        | 2,771         | 2,107         | 2,885         | 3,186         |
| Moyle District Council            | 1,187                        | 1,340         | 993           | 1,397         | 945           |
| Newry and Mourne District Council | 3,634                        | 3,944         | 2,700         | 5,605         | 5,382         |
| Newtownabbey Borough Council      | 1,869                        | 2,846         | 1,860         | 2,455         | 2,339         |
| North Down Borough Council        | 2,368                        | 2,465         | 1,462         | 1,755         | 1,938         |
| Omagh District Council            | 3,458                        | 4,424         | 2,971         | 4,923         | 4,262         |
| Strabane District Council         | 3,056                        | 3,617         | 3,028         | 4,592         | 4,366         |
| <b>Overall Total</b>              | <b>66,494</b>                | <b>77,332</b> | <b>62,986</b> | <b>85,190</b> | <b>88,312</b> |

### A5: Inquiry

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister for Regional Development when he will consider the findings of the inquiry into the A5 project; and when he will publish his assessment of these findings.

**(AQW 10135/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Public Inquiry into the proposed A5 Western Transport Corridor dual carriageway ended on 1 July 2011. The Inspector carried out follow-up site visits and considered all the evidence from the Inquiry to complete his Report. Roads Service received the Inspector's Report on the A5 Western Transport Corridor Public Inquiry on 24 February 2012 and officials are now reviewing the issues arising out of this significant body of work.

Roads Service will report to me on how it proposes to address the issues raised by the Inspector. I will then consider this submission in conjunction with the Inspector's comments and decide on the way forward. My decision will be communicated through a Departmental Statement, which will be issued along with the Inspector's Report. I anticipate this being released in late spring / early summer.

### A5: Inquiry

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the date the public inquiry report into the A5 was presented to his Department; (ii) why it has not been published; and (iii) when it will be published.

**(AQW 10140/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Public Inquiry into the proposed A5 Western Transport Corridor dual carriageway ended on 1 July 2011. The Inspector carried out follow-up site visits and considered all the evidence submitted during the Inquiry to assist with the completion of his Report. Roads Service received the Inspector's Report on the A5 Western Transport Corridor Public Inquiry on 24 February 2012 and officials are now reviewing the issues arising out of this significant body of work.

Roads Service will report to me on how it proposes to address the issues raised by the Inspector. I will then consider this submission in conjunction with the Inspector's comments and decide on the way forward. My decision will be communicated

through a Departmental Statement, which will be issued along with the Inspector's Report. I anticipate this being released in late spring / early summer.

It would be inappropriate to publish the Inspector's Report prior to the Departmental Statement.

### Car Parking Charges: Cookstown

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department plans to introduce car parking charges in Cookstown; and to detail any studies carried out on the impact that this may have on the town centre.

**(AQW 10192/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** My Department's Roads Service carries out a review of car park tariffs every year and I hope to announce the details of the 2012/2013 review in the near future, after I have informed the Committee for Regional Development.

I cannot give any information on the outcome of the review at this time.

### Water Charges: Non-domestic Customers

**Mr McGlone** asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the level of water charges for non-domestic customers who are being assessed according to the value of their property.

**(AQW 10194/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** The setting of annual tariffs is a matter for Northern Ireland Water (NIW) subject to the Utility Regulator's approval and the limits set out in the regulatory settlement which was agreed in 2010. A minority of NIW's non-domestic customers have charges based on their property value as it remains NIW's policy to extend measured charging. Non-domestic tariffs have remained within the limits permitted by the Utility Regulator through its regulatory process and NIW has raised tariffs by less than it could have done. The Executive has continued to subsidise unmeasured non-domestic bills at 50%. Water tariffs saw below inflation increases in 2012/13.

### Capital/Revenue Costs: Departmental Spend

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an estimate of the annual additional cost to his Department of providing its services in our divided society, broken down by (i) capital; and (ii) revenue costs.

**(AQW 10216/11-15)**

**Mr Kennedy:** Due to the number of variables involved, it is not possible for the Department for Regional Development to calculate the annual additional cost of service delivery.

## Department for Social Development

### Housing Executive: Temporary Accommodation

**Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister for Social Development how much the Housing Executive has paid to private landlords for providing temporary accommodation in each of the last three years, broken down by district office area.

**(AQW 9319/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):** The information is not available in the format requested as a breakdown of the figures by Housing Executive district office area is only available for the current financial year (to date); the previous two years are only available by Housing Executive area office. In addition, there is only one figure for the Belfast area for 2011/12 as temporary accommodation in Belfast is coordinated by the Homeless Services Unit in Belfast city centre.

The tables below detail the information:

**Table 1 - Private landlord properties used in 2011/12, by District Office (to date)**

| Housing Executive District Office | Number of properties | Total Estimated Cost (£)* |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Belfast Area</b>               |                      |                           |
| Belfast                           | 246                  | 2,291,720                 |
| South Area                        |                      |                           |
| Armagh                            | 7                    | 61,397                    |
| Banbridge                         | 5                    | 43,855                    |
| Dungannon                         | 42                   | 368,382                   |
| Newry                             | 53                   | 464,863                   |

| <b>Housing Executive District Office</b> | <b>Number of properties</b> | <b>Total Estimated Cost (£)*</b> |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Portadown                                | 5                           | 43,855                           |
| Lurgan                                   | 8                           | 70,168                           |
| Fermanagh                                | 47                          | 412,237                          |
| <b>West Area</b>                         |                             |                                  |
| Londonderry                              | 210                         | 1,471,470                        |
| Omagh                                    | 1                           | 7,007                            |
| Magherafelt                              | 4                           | 38,028                           |
| <b>North East Area</b>                   |                             |                                  |
| Antrim                                   | 36                          | 246,960                          |
| Ballycastle                              | 31                          | 212,660                          |
| Ballymena                                | 50                          | 343,000                          |
| Carrickfergus                            | 1                           | 6,860                            |
| Coleraine                                | 3                           | 20,580                           |
| Newtownabbey                             | 5                           | 34,300                           |
| <b>South East Area</b>                   |                             |                                  |
| Newtownards                              | 28                          | 209,916                          |
| Bangor                                   | 25                          | 187,425                          |
| Castlereagh                              | 24                          | 179,928                          |
| Downpatrick                              | 40                          | 299,880                          |
| Lisburn                                  | 85                          | 637,245                          |
| Dairyfarm                                | 37                          | 277,389                          |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>993</b>                  | <b>£7,929,125</b>                |

**Table 2 - Private landlord properties used in 2010/11, by Area Office**

| <b>Housing Executive Area</b> | <b>Number of properties</b> | <b>Total Estimated Cost (£)</b> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Belfast                       | 231                         | 2,102,930                       |
| South East Area               | 204                         | 1,435,752                       |
| South Area                    | 173                         | 1,424,482                       |
| West Area                     | 147                         | 966,966                         |
| North East Area               | 124                         | 798,560                         |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>879</b>                  | <b>£6,728,690</b>               |

**Table 3 - Private landlord properties used in 2009/10, by Area Office**

| <b>Housing Executive Area</b> | <b>Number of properties</b> | <b>Total Estimated Cost (£)</b> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Belfast                       | 231                         | 1,888,065                       |
| South East Area               | 220                         | 1,419,000                       |
| South Area                    | 173                         | 1,324,142                       |
| West Area                     | 147                         | 903,903                         |



| Housing Executive Area | Number of properties | Total Estimated Cost (£) |
|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| North East Area        | 124                  | 746,480                  |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>895</b>           | <b>£6,281,590</b>        |

The Housing Executive believes this demonstrates value for money as:-

- the Housing Executive has a statutory responsibility to provide temporary accommodation for those who find themselves homeless.
- there are around 20,000 homeless applications annually. Over 50% (around 10,400) met all the legislative homeless criteria and were full duty applicants.
- typically about 20% of those people who present as homeless are placed into temporary accommodation, which equates to around 4,000 annually.
- Housing Benefit covered approximately £5.7m (in 2011/12) of the estimated amount which is approximately 75% of the total cost.

#### Notes

- \* The Housing Executive has advised that, given the transient nature of this group, costs given can only be estimates as not all properties are occupied at all times and not all tenants are on full housing benefit. It should also be noted that the figures on temporary accommodation will fluctuate on a daily basis and are dependent on demand.

The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

#### Housing: Waiting List in North Down/Ards

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the changes in the number of people on the housing waiting list in the (i) North Down Borough Council; and (ii) Ards Borough Council areas in each of the last 12 months.

**(AQW 9371/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The information requested is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by District Council area. However, the attached table details the Waiting List for the Housing Executive's District Offices in Bangor and Newtownards at the end of March and June 2011. These are the most up to date figures currently available.

| District Office | 31 March 2011 |                              | 30 June 2011 |                              |
|-----------------|---------------|------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|
|                 | Applicants    | Applicants in Housing Stress | Applicants   | Applicants in Housing Stress |
| Bangor          | 1,884         | 960                          | 1,879        | 960                          |
| Newtownards     | 1,811         | 1,092                        | 1,811        | 1,092                        |

#### Disability Living Allowance: Benefit Reduction/Withdrawal

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance have had their benefit (i) reduced; or (ii) withdrawn in each of the last three years; and (ii) how many appealed the decision.

**(AQW 9698/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:**

- (i) The information is not available in the format requested, the table below details the number of customers who had their rate of entitlement to Disability Living Allowance maintained, reduced or disallowed following a supersession\* of their award, in each of the last the last three years.

| Year    | Number of Disability Living Allowance awards where the rate of entitlement was maintained, reduced or disallowed following a review |
|---------|---|
| 2008/09 | 4,092   |
| 2009/10 | 4,201   |
| 2010/11 | 3,953   |

- \* A supersession is a review of an existing award instigated by the customer or the Department as a result of a change in a customer's circumstances.

- (ii) The information is not available in the format requested; the table below details the number of customers who lost their entitlement to Disability Living Allowance on application of a renewal claim, in each of the last three years.

| Year    | Number of Disability Living Allowance Renewal claims disallowed |
|---------|---|
| 2008/09 | 3,277   |
| 2009/10 | 2,523   |
| 2010/11 | 2,522   |

- (iii) Appeals are received from applicants who have been unsuccessful in their application for Disability Living Allowance (nil awards) and also from those who have been awarded the benefit but are dissatisfied with the level of award made. Information on Disability Living Allowance appeals is recorded on an overall number basis and is not distinguishable by the circumstances of the decision under appeal, therefore, it is not possible to quantify how many applicants who had their benefit reduced or withdrawn subsequently progressed to appeal. The table below details the number of Disability Living Allowance appeals determined in each of the last three years.

| Year    | Number of Appeals Determined in the Appeal Service |
|---------|--|
| 2008/09 | 5,753  |
| 2009/10 | 5,147  |
| 2010/11 | 4,607  |

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### Vacant Properties: North Down

**Mr Weir** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of vacant (i) Housing Executive properties; Housing Association properties; and (iii) private residential properties in the North Down constituency, broken down by electoral ward (**AQW 9732/11-15**)

**Mr McCausland:** In relation to (i) the information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by electoral ward. However, Table 1 below details the vacant Housing Executive properties within the Housing Executive's Bangor District Office area which covers the North Down constituency. In relation to (ii) Table 2 details the vacant Housing Association properties by electoral ward for the North Down constituency.

However, in relation to (iii) my Department does not hold this information and the Department of Finance and Personnel has provided Table 3 which details the number of vacant domestic properties by electoral ward for the North Down constituency. The figures in Table 3 are as at 18 March 2012 and exclude vacant domestic properties whose accounts are recorded as NIHE, Housing Associations or Public Bodies.

**Table 1 - Number of vacant Housing Executive properties in the Bangor District Office area**

| Estate/Area                     | Number of vacant properties |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Bloomfield/Rathgill/Willowbrook | 9                           |
| Clandeboyne Road                | 1                           |
| Conlig/Breezemount              | 3                           |
| Groomsport                      | 1                           |
| Kilcooley                       | 31                          |
| Lisnabreen                      | 3                           |
| Loughview                       | 11                          |
| Redburn                         | 2                           |
| Woodlands                       | 1                           |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>62</b>                   |

**Table 2 - Number of vacant Housing Association properties in the North Down constituency**

| <b>North Down Electoral Wards</b> | <b>Number of vacant properties</b> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Goomsport                         | 2                                  |
| Ballyholme                        | 2                                  |
| Bangor Castle                     | 1                                  |
| Harbour                           | 1                                  |
| Conlig                            | 3                                  |
| Silverstream                      | 3                                  |
| Rathgael                          | 1                                  |
| Hollywood Priory                  | 1                                  |
| Hollywood Demesne                 | 2                                  |
| Donaghadee North                  | 2                                  |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>18</b>                          |

**Table 3 \* - Number of vacant domestic properties by electoral ward for the North Down constituency.**

| <b>North Down Electoral Wards</b> | <b>Number of Vacant Properties</b> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Ballycrochan                      | 23                                 |
| Ballyholme                        | 61                                 |
| Ballymacconnell                   | 20                                 |
| Ballymagee                        | 23                                 |
| Bangor Castle                     | 57                                 |
| Bloomfield                        | 19                                 |
| Broadway                          | 44                                 |
| Bryansburn                        | 45                                 |
| Churchill                         | 51                                 |
| Clandeboye                        | 31                                 |
| Conlig                            | 68                                 |
| Craigavad                         | 54                                 |
| Crawfordsburn                     | 44                                 |
| Cultra                            | 61                                 |
| Dufferin                          | 28                                 |
| Goomsport                         | 75                                 |
| Harbour                           | 158                                |
| Hollywood Demesne                 | 67                                 |
| Hollywood Priory                  | 50                                 |
| Loughview                         | 28                                 |
| Princetown                        | 79                                 |
| Rathgael                          | 43                                 |
| Silverstream                      | 34                                 |

| North Down Electoral Wards | Number of Vacant Properties |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Spring Hill                | 22                          |
| Whitehill                  | 32                          |
| North Down                 | 1,217                       |

\* Information was provided by DFP and excludes vacant domestic properties whose accounts are recorded as NIHE, Housing Associations or Public Bodies.

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### Loft Insulation

**Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 8614/11-15, to detail (i) the percentage of (a) Housing Executive; and (b) Housing Association homes fitted with the highest standard of loft insulation, that is, more than 150mm; and (ii) what plans the (a) Housing Executive; and (b) Housing Associations have to upgrade their entire estate to the 150mm standard.

**(AQW 9807/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive and Housing Associations do not routinely collate these details. However, excluding dwellings without lofts that do therefore not need loft insulation, for example, non-traditional stock such as flats, maisonettes, flat-roofed houses etc, the Housing Executive has estimated that approximately 60,000 of their stock need loft insulation brought up to a 150mm+ standard. Those homes requiring upgrading will have this work carried out as they work through their stock during External Cyclical Maintenance, heating replacement and other schemes.

Excluding those dwellings that do not have lofts, the majority of Housing Associations have advised me that over 80% of their stock meets or exceeds the 150mm depth of insulation. Housing Associations in general have advised me that they plan to upgrade loft insulation in either this or the next financial year where viable, or within heating upgrade schemes (such as Cosy Homes schemes) or as part of planned maintenance work. In addition other Housing Associations have confirmed that all their stock already meets the 150mm standard and a significant number exceeds this level. For example, Alpha, Gosford, Habinteg, Newington, South Ulster and St Matthews Housing Associations confirm that 100% of their properties meet a minimum of 150mm.

### Warm Homes Scheme: People with MS

**Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Social Development whether any specific fuel poverty or warm home schemes are available for people with Multiple Sclerosis (MS), given the nature of the illness and the home heating requirements of people with MS.

**(AQW 9872/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** There are no fuel poverty schemes specifically targeted at people with Multiple Sclerosis. My Department's Warm Homes Scheme provides a range of insulation and heating measures to vulnerable households including those who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance. People aged 60 and over who are suffering from Multiple Sclerosis or any other illness or disability can also benefit from the Winter Fuel Payment scheme.

### Papers for Assembly Committees

**Mr McKay** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all occasions in the last 12 months when his Department has made a presentation to an Assembly committee and provided papers pertaining to that presentation to the committee less than 48 hours beforehand.

**(AQW 9973/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The information requested is included in the table below:

| Briefing   | Papers to Committee | Date of SDC Meeting |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Supporting People (Special Needs Management Allowance) | 15 March 2012       | 15 March 2012       |
| Consultation Bereavement Benefit for the 21st Century  | 6 March 2012        | 8 March 2012        |
| Helm Housing Association                               | 11 January 2012     | 12 January 2012     |
| Charities Amendment Bill                               | 18 October 2011     | 20 October 2011     |
| NIHE Review  | 14 June 2011        | 16 June 2011        |

## Community Care Grant Applications

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister for Social Development, for each district council area, to detail (i) the number of Community Care Grant applications made during the timeframe attached at Annex 2 of the 'Replacement of the Existing Discretionary Social Fund Scheme in Northern Ireland- Research Study Specification - A Draft Final Report to the Social Security Agency' which was tabled at the Social Development Committee meeting on 26 January 2012; (ii) the total value of the applications; (iii) the number of successful applications; (iv) the total value of the grants awarded; (iv) the level of grant initially awarded to each recipient; (v) the number of appeals; and (vi) the amount awarded to each recipient on appeal.

**(AQW 10052/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The information requested is set out in the table below.

- (i) Column 2 details the total number of Community Care Grant applications, for each district council area.
- (ii) Column 3 details the total value of applications made. .
- (iii) Column 4 details the number of successful applications.
- (iv) Column 5 details the total value of Community Care Grants awarded.
- (v) The amount of money initially awarded to each recipient could only be obtained at disproportionate cost as this would involve checking in excess of 27,000 individual applications.

(vi / vii) Whilst a customer may request an internal review of an unfavourable decision made by a Social Fund Officer and subsequently an independent review by the Office of the Social Fund Commissioner, the number and subsequent amount of such reviews is not routinely recorded in the format requested.

**Table of Community Care Grant applications and awards made in 2010/2011 year by Council area**

| Local Government District                  | No of Community Care Grant applications* | Total amount applied for (£) | No of Successful Community Care Grant Applicants* | Total Amount Awarded for successful applications (£) |
|--|--|------------------------------|---|--|
| Antrim Borough Council                     | 837                                      | 1,016,000                    | 477   | 250,000  |
| Ards Borough Council                       | 880                                      | 1,189,000                    | 384   | 229,000  |
| Armagh City and District Council           | 952                                      | 1,091,000                    | 542   | 294,000  |
| Ballymena Borough Council                  | 925                                      | 1,274,000                    | 496   | 269,000  |
| Ballymoney Borough Council                 | 529                                      | 573,000                      | 309   | 130,000  |
| Banbridge District Council                 | 703                                      | 930,000                      | 377   | 200,000  |
| Belfast City Council                       | 12,970                                   | 15,674,000                   | 7,617   | 3,927,000  |
| Carrickfergus Borough Council              | 705                                      | 859,000                      | 385   | 197,000  |
| Castlereagh Borough Council                | 641                                      | 948,000                      | 294   | 181,000  |
| Coleraine Borough Council                  | 1,199                                    | 1,290,000                    | 630   | 293,000  |
| Cookstown District Council                 | 939                                      | 1,101,000                    | 570   | 276,000  |
| Craigavon Borough Council                  | 2,706                                    | 2,932,000                    | 1,502   | 738,000  |
| Derry City Council                         | 5,109                                    | 6,329,000                    | 3,370   | 1,726,000  |
| Down District Council                      | 2,150                                    | 2,625,000                    | 1,335   | 664,000  |
| Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council | 1,415                                    | 1,701,000                    | 829   | 430,000  |
| Fermanagh District Council                 | 1,116                                    | 1,302,000                    | 694   | 267,000  |
| Larne Borough Council                      | 710                                      | 782,000                      | 363   | 179,000  |
| Limavady Borough Council                   | 1,007                                    | 1,074,000                    | 556   | 250,000  |
| Lisburn City Council                       | 2,793                                    | 3,517,000                    | 1,645   | 910,000  |
| Magherafelt District Council               | 767                                      | 874,000                      | 491   | 238,000  |
| Moyle District Council                     | 372                                      | 421,000                      | 227   | 111,000  |

| <b>Local Government District</b>  | <b>No of Community Care Grant applications*</b> | <b>Total amount applied for (£)</b> | <b>No of Successful Community Care Grant Applicants*</b> | <b>Total Amount Awarded for successful applications (£)</b> |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Newry and Mourne District Council | 2,093   | 2,767,000                           | 1,207  | 649,000   |
| Newtownabbey Borough Council      | 1,526   | 1,901,000                           | 855  | 439,000   |
| North Down Borough Council        | 816   | 1,074,000                           | 347  | 200,000   |
| Omagh District Council            | 1,175   | 1,372,000                           | 746  | 278,000   |
| Strabane District Council         | 1,654   | 1,872,000                           | 1,005  | 368,000   |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>46,689</b>                                   | <b>56,489,000</b>                   | <b>27,253</b>  | <b>13,695,000**</b>   |

\* People can make multiple applications throughout the year. This is particularly pertinent when divided by population estimations as it could result in double counting. Estimates are provided for mid-2010.

\*\* All figures are rounded to the nearest 1,000. Individual figures will not sum to totals due to rounding.

The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all such Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

### **Housing Executive Properties: Insurance**

**Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister for Social Development whether a Housing Executive tenant is required to have (i) home buildings insurance; and (ii) home contents insurance.

**(AQW 10067/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The Housing Executive has advised that buildings insurance is not a matter for their tenants. A "Your Rights and Responsibilities" booklet advises that the Housing Executive is responsible for the structure of a tenant's home. However, the Housing Executive strongly recommends that tenants arrange for insurance of the contents of their home so that they will be protected against accidental damage, loss or theft; they advise tenants that they can arrange house contents insurance through any bank, building society or insurance agent.

As the uptake of home insurance is low the Housing Executive routinely runs publicity campaigns on the benefits of home insurance. In addition their annual Housing News publication for tenants regularly features an article on the need to have home contents insurance.

### **Pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme**

**Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme (i) when a full evaluation will commence and be completed; and (ii) when a new scheme will be launched.

**(AQW 10132/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** An evaluation of the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme has commenced and will be completed by the end of April. Once the evaluation has been completed I hope to be in a position to make an announcement about future schemes.

### **CPR: Staff Training**

**Mr Frew** asked the Minister for Social Development what strategy is in place to train departmental staff in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation.

**(AQW 10154/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) is covered in the First Aid at Work course attended by all Departmental first aiders. The Departmental policy is that there should be at least 2 first aiders per 50 members of staff. There is no formal CPR strategy in place and it was not identified as an issue in the overall assessment completed for the provision of first aid.

### **Housing Executive Properties: Restrictions on the Travelling Community**

**Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for Social Development, in the interests of safety and good relations, whether he will introduce legislation to (i) impose restrictions on members of the travelling community, who are residing in Housing Executive properties, in relation to using roads and other areas within the vicinity of the property as illegal caravan parks and camps which cause obstruction to other residents; (ii) restrict the number of vehicles, including caravans, per traveller household, particularly where

space is limited; and (iii) require travellers to relinquish caravans in lieu of a Housing Executive property and refrain from placing caravans outside or around the property.

**(AQW 10173/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The Department for Regional Development (DRD) is the authority with the responsibility and statutory competence for regulation of the public high way (adopted roads). It is understood that there is presently roads legislation in place which deals with obstruction of the highway and road safety.

With regard to restricting the number of vehicles, including caravans, per Traveller household and requiring Travellers to relinquish caravans in lieu of a Housing Executive Tenancy it should be noted that The Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 prohibits discrimination on a number of grounds and specifically identifies the Irish Traveller community as a racial group. The Housing Executive must allocate accommodation held by it in accordance with the rules of the statutory Housing Selection Scheme.

Against this background, it should be understood that members of the Travelling Community hold NIHE tenancies on exactly the same terms and conditions as those held by a member of the settled community. All tenants regardless of what community they belong to are obliged by their tenancy not to park or allow to be parked any caravan, boat, vehicle or other items or goods within the curtilage or neighbourhood of the dwelling in such a position or in such a manner as to cause a nuisance or annoyance to the occupiers of any neighbouring or adjoining premises. Any person who does so in such a manner or in a position to cause a nuisance or annoyance will be in breach of their tenancy agreement with the Housing Executive.

### **Housing: One-bed Properties in Coleraine**

**Mr Campbell** asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of one-bed properties in the social housing sector in the Coleraine District Office area; and (ii) as of 1 March 2012, how many were available to let.

**(AQW 10178/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The Housing Executive has 291 one-bed properties, five of which were available to let at 1 March 2012. Housing Associations have advised there are 310 one-bed properties in the Coleraine District Office area and at 1 March 2012 there were none available to let.

### **Warm Homes Scheme: Financial Top-up**

**Mr Agnew** asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Warm Homes Scheme, whether it is possible for people to top up the costs that exceed the maximum value of the grant available or whether it is an all or nothing scheme; and to outline the rationale for this position.

**(AQW 10215/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The policy intention of the Warm Homes Scheme is to improve the energy efficiency of the homes of vulnerable people who are on low income. Since the Warm Homes Scheme was introduced in 2001, householders have never been able to provide a financial top up when the grant limit was exceeded as the scheme is targeted at those on low income.

### **Capital/Revenue Costs: Departmental Spend**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister for Social Development for an estimate of the annual additional cost to his Department of providing its services in our divided society, broken down by (i) capital; and (ii) revenue costs.

**(AQW 10217/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** Due to the diverse nature of services provided by this Department and the number of variables involved, it is not possible to calculate the annual additional cost of service delivery.

### **Welfare Reform Bill: Introduction**

**Mr Copeland** asked the Minister for Social Development when he intends to table the Welfare Reform Bill.

**(AQW 10220/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** I intend shortly to seek Executive Agreement to my proposals to bring forward a Welfare Reform Bill for Northern Ireland. The Welfare Reform Bill will contain enabling provisions introducing Universal Credit.

### **Ballee Lands, Ballymena**

**Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Ballee lands, Ballymena (i) why his Department did not negotiate resale to the former owners, given it had at least one such offer, instead of moving to disposal through offers by tender; (ii) how this course is compatible with the Land and Property Services (LPS) guidelines on disposal of surplus land; (iii) whether the land will be disposed of by tender at a price below the LPS valuation, given that an offer from a former owner was refused on this basis; (iv) if the offers by tender fall below the offer rejected from the former owner, what action his Department will take; (v) why, given considerations of transparency, his Department chose to proceed by way of offers by tender, rather than sale by public auction; and (vi) whether his Department will publish the amounts offered by tender.

**(AQW 10302/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The lands referred to are situated at Ballee Road East in Ballymena.

- (i) My department did seek to negotiate the sale of the land back to the former owners and their successors in title. On two occasions, in September 2009 and July 2011, offers were received but the amounts offered fell short of the Land and Property Services (LPS) estimate of the market value of the land at those times and the offers were rejected. It was only after my department failed to negotiate a mutually acceptable price with the former owners for a second time that it moved to dispose of the land.
- (ii) This course of action is in accordance with the procedure set out in the LPS guidelines on the disposal of public sector property.
- (iii) Only one valid tender in the format required by my Department was submitted by the closing date for tenders. The amount offered fell well short of the LPS current estimate of the value of the land and has been rejected.
- (iv) At this time, no acceptable offers have been received from either the former owners or the open market. Since this set of circumstances is not covered by the LPS guidelines on the disposal of public sector property, my department will be taking advice on what the next step in the disposal process should be.
- (v) The decision to dispose of the land by way of offers by tender was taken on advice from the LPS and the commercial estate agent engaged to handle the disposal property. It was considered that this was the method which was most likely to secure the best price for the land in light of the current market conditions and known interest in the site.
- (vi) No, since this information is commercial-in-confidence and disclosure would hinder my department's efforts to secure the best price for the land at a future date.

### Sick Absence Guidance

**Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his Department's guidelines for departmental staff who are unable to work because of an illness.

**(AQW 10320/11-15)**

**Mr McCausland:** The main guidance relating to staff unable to attend work due to illness is contained in the NICS HR Handbook – Chapter 3.10: Sickness Absence and Chapter 6.06: Inefficiency – Sickness Absence. This NICS-wide policy provides an appropriate balance between the needs of the service and the needs of individuals when dealing with sickness absence. This guidance applies to all NICS employees, including Department for Social Development staff.

In line with this policy and the NICS People Strategy, my Department developed its own Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan for 2010 – 2013. This provides an innovative and holistic approach to health and wellbeing under the key themes of Prevention, Early Intervention and Responsibility.

Departmental staff are actively encouraged to take ownership of their own health and to make healthy lifestyle choices. Where possible, they are supported to remain in, or return to, work through timely interventions. Reasonable adjustments are also considered, where appropriate. If an individual becomes ill, managers are encouraged to engage with the officer as quickly as possible. Both line managers and members of staff are encouraged to take responsibility for managing sickness absences and bringing them to the swiftest conclusion. Staff who are unable to maintain an acceptable level of attendance may ultimately be dismissed from the Department in accordance with the NICS Policy. Retirement on medical grounds is also available for staff following professional advice from the NICS Occupational Health Service.

## Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

### Committee Meetings: Cost of Refreshments

**Mr Allister** asked the Assembly Commission what has been the cost of providing refreshments for Assembly Committee meetings in each of the last five years.

**(AQW 10009/11-15)**

**Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The cost of refreshments for Assembly Committees for the last five financial years is as follows;

| Year         | Cost            |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 2007/08      | £28,920         |
| 2008/09      | £40,763         |
| 2009/10      | £37,308         |
| 2010/11      | £37,604         |
| 2011/12      | £18,556*        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>£163,151</b> |

\* Invoices for March 2012 still to be finalised.



## Engagement and Outreach: South Down

**Ms Ruane** asked the Assembly Commission to outline the number and type of engagements and outreach initiatives that have been undertaken, since January 2011, with organisations in the South Down area.

**(AQO 1687/11-15)**

**Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** In accordance with the Assembly's strategic objective to ensure that its work is accessible to all and communicated widely, the Outreach and Education Service has developed a number of programmes and resources. Engagement is not necessarily based on specific constituencies.

Between May 2007 and the end of January 2012, 126 groups from the South Down constituency comprising of 4,064 people visited Parliament Buildings to participate in the Education Programme. The average number of groups across all constituencies during this period was 100 with an average of 3,228 people. During the same period 1718 people from the South Down constituency participated in tours of Parliament Buildings. The average across all constituencies was 1,716.

The Commission is always looking for new ways to engage as widely as possible and would be happy to receive any suggestions that Members might wish to make. The majority of the functions and many tours within Parliament Buildings are directly sponsored by Members themselves and the Commission is always keen to encourage individual Members to actively participate in bringing members of the public/groups etc. to Parliament Buildings.

## Parliament Buildings: Defibrillators

**Mr McMullan** asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) the number of defibrillators available at Parliament Buildings; (ii) where they are located; and (iii) how many members of staff are trained in their use.

**(AQW 10114/11-15)**

**Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** I can confirm:

- (i) That there are currently 3 defibrillators available for use in Parliament Buildings.
- (ii) The defibrillators are located in the Blue Flax Restaurant in the Basement; Room 401 within the Finance Office and at the reception desk at the front entrance.
- (iii) There are currently 25 staff trained to use the defibrillators and these include Security Guards, Ushers, front of house staff and staff from various directorates. These staff have all successfully completed the first aid at work certificate.

## North/South Parliamentary Forum

**Mrs D Kelly** asked the Assembly Commission when the first formal meeting of the North-South Parliamentary Forum will be held.

**(AQO 1680/11-15)**

**Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** To date, two joint meetings of the North South Parliamentary Forum Working Groups have been held to take forward the ideas and actions generated at the North South Parliamentary Forum Conference in the Slieve Donard Hotel in October 2010. These meetings related to Parliamentary Relationships with Europe and Agriculture and Rural Development Reform. In addition a number of meetings of the North South Parliamentary Forum Working Group in the Assembly have taken place over the past three months.

The Assembly Working Group has consulted with Party Leaders on draft proposals. When the Assembly Working Group has agreed a position, the Speaker will send it to the Ceann Comhairle for the Oireachtas Working Group to consider. It would be hoped that a Joint Working Group meeting could then be held to discuss and agree future arrangements and meetings.

## North/South Parliamentary Forum

**Ms J McCann** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the establishment of the North-South Parliamentary Forum.

**(AQO 1689/11-15)**

**Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** To date, two joint meetings of the North South Parliamentary Forum Working Groups have been held to take forward the ideas and actions generated at the North South Parliamentary Forum Conference in the Slieve Donard Hotel in October 2010. These meetings related to Parliamentary Relationships with Europe and Agriculture and Rural Development Reform. In addition a number of meetings of the North South Parliamentary Forum Working Group in the Assembly have taken place over the past three months.

The Assembly Working Group has consulted with Party Leaders on draft proposals. When the Assembly Working Group has agreed a position, the Speaker will send it to the Ceann Comhairle for the Oireachtas Working Group to consider. It would be hoped that a Joint Working Group meeting could then be held to discuss and agree future arrangements and meetings.

## Security and Usher Services: Cost

**Mr Agnew** asked the Assembly Commission to detail the cost of employing agency staff as (i) security officers; and (ii) ushers in each of the last three years; and whether, following the Commission's efficiency review, the cost of providing usher and security services will now be taken from the events budget, or included in the price to the customer who made the booking, rather than being taken from the facilities budget.

**(AQW 10214/11-15)**

**Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):** The cost of employing agency staff for both (i) security officers and (ii) ushers in each of the last three years is as follows:

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Cost</b> |
|-------------|-------------|
| 2009/10     | £1,140,448* |
| 2010/11     | £436,840    |
| 2011/12     | £5,852**    |

\* Considerably higher costs incurred as recruitment campaign for permanent Assembly Commission staff had not been undertaken at this time.

\*\* March 2012 costs still to be included.

The costs are not held by type of staff (i.e. Security or Ushers).

The Commission's Business Efficiency reviews are on-going. The budget for staff costs for Security and Ushers is held by the Facilities Directorate. The vast majority of these costs do not relate to events so there are no plans, at present, to transfer the staff budget for Security and Ushers to the Events budget as this would split the overall budget across a number of organisational business areas with no specific benefit. A number of direct costs are already charged to event organisers and a review of this policy, to consider charging Assembly Commission staff costs, will be informed by any recommendations made by the Business Efficiency review of the Events business area.

# Revised Written Answers

This section contains the revised written answers to questions tabled by Members. The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.



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# Revised Written Answers

## Education

### Equality Impact Assessment on Preparatory Schools Funding

*In this Bound Volume, page WA20, replace the answer to the question (AQW 8674/11-15) asked by Peter Weir with:*

**Mr O'Dowd (Minister of Education):** Over 400 responses were received in respect of the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) consultation on the proposal to withdraw funding from preparatory departments of grammar schools and these have been collated and analysed.

You will recall that the former Minister, Catriona Ruane, took account of the comments received as part of the EQIA consultation exercise and recognised that the complete ending of funding may have caused difficulties for parents and children and possible disruption to some schools. Hence, notwithstanding her publically stated views, she decided to continue funding preparatory departments but at a reduced level. With effect from September 2010 the level of funding was reduced by one-third (i.e. the previous weighting was reduced from 0.40 to 0.27 of an Age Weighted Pupil Unit).

I am planning to complete the final stages of the EQIA and publish it on the Department's website before the end of April 2012.

## Environment

### Local Council Staff: Redundancy or Retirement Packages

*In Bound Volume 71, page WA180, replace the answer to the question (AQW 5798/11-15) asked by Lord Morrow with:*

**Mr Attwood (Minister of the Environment):**

- (i) No local council staff who had taken redundancy packages has been re-employed by the same council in the last three financial years.
- (ii) Three local council staff who had taken retirement packages has been re-employed by the same council in the last three financial years.

Please note that these figures refer to staff being re-employed by the same council as it is not possible to verify whether they have been re-employed by other public bodies.

## Justice

### Robert Black

*In Bound Volume 68, page WA317, replace the answer to the question (AQW 3975/11-15) asked by Lord Morrow with:*

**Mr Ford (Minister of Justice):** I am writing to correct an error contained in my answer dated 14 November to AQW3975/11-15 and my subsequent response provided you on 31 January, which corrected the original answer.

The answer provided in AQW 3975/11-15, mistakenly, included the cost of £5675 for transporting Robert Black to Northern Ireland from England on 8 September 2011. However, it has now come to light that the total cost of the flight amounted to £4,643.10. This inaccuracy was largely due to a miscalculation in the net amount of costs subject to Value Added Tax (VAT).

The corrected details are:

|                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Non Vatable Net:   | £4,563.10        |
| Vatable Net:       | £66.67           |
| Total Net:         | £4,629.77        |
| VAT:               | £13.33           |
| <b>Total cost:</b> | <b>£4,643.10</b> |

The cost is therefore reduced by £1031.90.

I am copying this letter to the Editor of Debates and the Business Office.

Please accept my apology for this error.



Official Report  
(Hansard)  
Members' Index





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# Journal of Proceedings



# Minutes of Proceedings





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# Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 12 March 2012

*The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.*

## 1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

## 2. Executive Committee Business

### 2.1 Motion - Suspend Standing Orders

**Proposed:**

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 12 March 2012.

*Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

### 2.2 Motion - Programme For Government 2011-15

**Proposed:**

That this Assembly endorses the Programme for Government 2011-15 agreed by the Executive.

*Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister*

*Debate ensued.*

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.*

*The debate was suspended for Question Time.*

## 3. Question Time

### 3.1 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland.

### 3.2 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. The junior Minister, Ms Martina Anderson, also answered a number of questions.

## 4. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

### 4.1 Motion - Programme For Government 2011-15 (Cont'd)

*Debate resumed on the motion.*

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.*

*The Speaker took the Chair.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** (Division 1).

### 4.2 Statement - Salmon Conservation in the DCAL jurisdiction

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.*

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Mr Carál Ní Chuilín, made a statement regarding Salmon Conservation in the DCAL Jurisdiction, following which she replied to questions.

#### **4.3 First Stage - Superannuation Bill**

The Minister for Finance and Personnel, introduced a Bill to make provision for and in connection with limiting the value of the benefits which may be provided under so much of any scheme under Article 3 of the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 as provides by virtue of Article 4(2) of that Order for benefits to be provided by way of compensation to or in respect of persons who suffer loss of office or employment; and to make provision about the procedure for modifying such a scheme.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

#### **4.4 Motion - The Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012**

**Proposed:**

That the Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

*Minister of Finance and Personnel*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

#### **4.5 Motion - The Rates (Microgeneration) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012**

**Proposed:**

That the Rates (Microgeneration) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

*Minister of Finance and Personnel*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

## **5. Adjournment**

**Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

*The Speaker*

*The Assembly adjourned at 7.13pm.*

**Mr William Hay**

**The Speaker**

12 March 2012

# Northern Ireland Assembly

12 March 2012

Division 1

**Programme For Government 2011-15 - Motion**

**Proposed:**

That this Assembly endorses the Programme for Government 2011-15 agreed by the Executive.

*Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 73

Noes: 11

**AYES**

*Ms M Anderson, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mr Doherty, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, 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 Lewis, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCreagh, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Rt P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Brady and Mr G Robinson.*

**NOES**

*Mr Allister, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Mr Eastwood.*

The Motion was **carried**.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

## Papers Presented to the Assembly on 7 - 12 March 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
  - Joint Unannounced Inspection by RQIA and CJI of Infection Prevention and Hygiene in Roe House, HMP Maghaberry (DOJ)
  - Special EU Programmes Body Annual Report 2010 (OFMDFM)
  - Draft Guidance on the Use of Fixed Penalty Notices (DOE)
5. Assembly Reports
  - Report on the Pensions Bill (NIA 40-11-15) (Committee for Social Development)
6. Statutory Rules
  - S.R. 2012/74 The Road Traffic (Financial Penalty Deposit) (Interest) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
  - S.R. 2012/77 The Road Traffic Offenders (Prescribed Devices) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
  - S.R. 2012/78 The Health and Personal Social Services (Superannuation), Health and Social Care (Pension Scheme) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
  - S.R. 2012/82 Police Service of Northern Ireland and Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve (Injury Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (DOJ)
  - S.R. 2012/86 The Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)
  - S.R. 2012/87 The Social Security Revaluation of Earnings Factors Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/88 The Social Security Pensions (Low Earnings Threshold) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/89 The Social Security Pensions (Flat Rate Accrual Amount) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/94 The Belfast International Airport (Control Over Land) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
  - S.R. 2012/95 The Foyle Area (Greenbraes Fishery Angling Permits) Regulations 2012 (DARD)
  - S.R. 2012/96 The Fair Employment (Specification of Public Authorities) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (OFMDFM)
  - S.R. 2012/98 The Occupational and Personal Pension Scheme (Levies) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/99 The Pension Protection Fund and Occupational Pension Schemes (Levy Ceiling and Compensation Cap) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/100 The Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Prescribed Diseases) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/101 The Grange Lodge, Antrim (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
  - S.R. 2012/103 The Shore Road and Northwood Parade, Belfast (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)

- S.R. 2012/104 The Loopland Court, Belfast (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/106 Rates (Small Business Hereditament Relief) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
- S.R. 2012/107 The Social Security (Claims and Payments) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/108 The Social Security (Recovery) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/111 The Recovery of Health Services Charges (Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)

**For Information Only:**

- S.R. 2012/68 (C.9) The Health (2009 Act) (Commencement No.1) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
- S.R. 2012/102 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Strabane) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)

## 7. Written Ministerial Statements

## 8. Consultation Documents

## 9. Departmental Publications

- The Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2011 (OFMDFM)

## 10. Agency Publications

## 11. Westminster Publications

## 12. Miscellaneous Publications



# Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 13 March 2012

*The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.*

## 1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

## 2. Executive Committee Business

### 2.1 Motion - The Northern Ireland Economic Strategy

#### **Proposed:**

That this Assembly endorses the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy agreed by the Executive.

*Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment*

*Debate ensued.*

*The sitting was suspended at 12.32pm.*

*The sitting resumed at 2.00pm with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) 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.

## 4. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

### 4.1 Motion - The Northern Ireland Economic Strategy (Cont'd)

*Debate resumed on the motion.*

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

### 4.2 Statement - North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Environment sectoral format

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood, made a statement regarding the North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Environment sectoral format, following which he replied to questions.

### 4.3 Motion - The Draft Dog Control Orders (Prescribed Offences and Penalties, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

#### **Proposed:**

That the draft Dog Control Orders (Prescribed Offences and Penalties, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

*Minister of the Environment*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

**4.4 Statement - The Way Forward for Community Pharmacy**

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding the Way Forward for Community Pharmacy, following which he replied to questions.

## 5. Adjournment

Mr Dáithí McKay spoke to his topic on Hotel provision in Ballycastle.

**Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

*The Speaker*

*The Assembly adjourned at 6.42pm.*

**Mr William Hay**

**The Speaker**

13 March 2012



# Northern Ireland Assembly

## **Papers Presented to the Assembly on 13 March 2012**

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly  
Superannuation Bill (NIA Bill 6/11-15)
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly  
Code of Practice on Litter (DOE)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
  - S.R. 2012/91 The Sunbeds (Information) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
  - S.R. 2012/92 The Sunbeds (Fixed Penalty) (Amount) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
  - S.R. 2012/93 The Sunbeds (Fixed Penalty) (General) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
  - S.R. 2012/97 The Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)

**For Information Only:**

  - S.R. 2012/90 (C.10) The Sunbeds (2011 Act) (Commencement No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
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 13 March 2012

### 2011-2015 Mandate Executive Bills

| Title & Bill Number                      | First Stage | Second Stage | Comm. Stage to Conclude | Report Ordered to be Printed | CS       | FCS      | Final Stage | Royal Assent |
|--|-------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------|----------|-------------|--------------|
| /Budget (No. 2) Bill NIA Bill 1/11-15    | 13.06.11    | 20.06.11     | N/A                     | N/A                          | 21.06.11 | 27.06.11 | 27.06.11    | 25.07.11     |
| /Rates (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 2/11-15 | 16.01.12    | 24.01.12     | N/A                     | N/A                          | 31.01.12 | 06.02.12 | 07.02.12    | 28.02.12     |
| Pensions Bill NIA Bill 3/11-15           | 23.01.12    | 31.01.12     | 13.03.12                | 08.03.12                     |          |          |             |              |
| /Budget Bill NIA Bill 4/11-15            | 13.02.12    | 14.02.12     | N/A                     | N/A                          | 20.02.12 | 21.02.12 | 27.02.12    |              |
| Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15             | 21.02.12    | 05.03.12     | 19.04.12                |                              |          |          |             |              |
| Superannuation Bill 6/11-15              | 12.03.12    |              |                         |                              |          |          |             |              |

### 2011-2015 Mandate Non-Executive Bills

| Title & Bill Number | First Stage | Second Stage | Comm. Stage to Conclude | Report Ordered to be Printed | CS | FCS | Final Stage | Royal Assent |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----|-----|-------------|--------------|
|                     |             |              |                         |                              |    |     |             |              |

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage



# Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 20 March 2012

*The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.*

## 1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

## 2. Speaker's Business

### 2.1 Public Petition - Proposed Closure of Woodlands Speech and Language Centre

Mr Pat Ramsey was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to the proposed closure of Woodlands Speech and Language Centre.

## 3. Executive Committee Business

### 3.1 Statement - British-Irish Council meeting on Social Inclusion

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, made a statement on the British-Irish Council meeting on Social Inclusion, held in Cardiff on 7 March 2012, following which he replied to questions.

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.*

### 3.2 Motion - The Draft Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

#### **Proposed:**

That the draft Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

*Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

### 3.3 Motion - The Draft Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

#### **Proposed:**

That the draft Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

*Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

## 4. Committee Business

### 4.1 Motion - Provision of IVF Treatment

#### **Proposed:**

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to fund three full cycles of IVF treatment, including the subsequent transfer of any viable frozen embryos, as recommended by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE); and further calls on the Minister to undertake a review of fertility services based

on the updated NICE guideline on the assessment and treatment of people with fertility problems which is due to be published in July 2012.

*Chairperson, Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

#### **4.2 Motion - Extension of Committee Stage: Marine Bill (NIA Bill 5/11-15)**

##### **Proposed:**

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33 (4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33 (2) be extended to 6 July 2012, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Marine Bill (NIA Bill 5/11-15).

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.23pm.*

*The sitting resumed at 2.00pm with the Speaker in the Chair.*

## 5. Question Time

### **5.1 Agriculture and Rural Development**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

### **5.2 Employment and Learning**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

### **5.3 Enterprise, Trade and Investment**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

### **5.4 Finance and Personnel**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson.

*The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.*

## 6. Assembly Business

### **6.1 Royal Assent**

The Speaker informed Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 20 March 2012 to the Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2012.

## 7. Adjournment

Mr Gordon Dunne spoke to his topic on Regeneration of Bangor Town Centre.

##### **Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

*The Speaker*

*The Assembly adjourned at 4.45pm.*

**Mr William Hay**  
**The Speaker**

20 March 2012

# Northern Ireland Assembly

## Papers Presented to the Assembly on 20 March 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
  - Regional Development Strategy (DRD)
5. Assembly Reports
  - Report on the Use of External Consultants by Northern Ireland Departments: Follow-up Report (NIA 43/11-15) (Public Accounts Committee)
6. Statutory Rules
  - S.R. 2012/109 The Social Security (Credits) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/110 The Pensions (2005 Order) (Disclosure of Restricted Information by the Pensions Regulator) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/112 The Waste (Fees and Charges) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
  - S.R. 2012/113 The Pensions (Institute and Faculty of Actuaries and Consultation by Employers) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/116 The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/117 The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/118 The Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Dependency) (Permitted Earnings Limits) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/120 The Pensions (2008 Act) (Abolition of Contracting-out for Defined Contribution Pension Schemes) (Consequential Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/121 The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/122 The Valuation Tribunal (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)
  - S.R. 2012/124 The Pensions (2008 No.2 Act) (Abolition of Protected Rights) (Consequential Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/125 The Occupational Pension Schemes (Contracting-out and Modification of Schemes) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
  - S.R. 2012/126 The Teachers' Superannuation (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DE)
  - S.R. 2012/130 The Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
  - S.R. 2012/132 The Dogs (Licensing and Identification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)

**For Information Only:**

  - S.R. 2012/105 The High Hedges (Fee Transfer) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
  - S.R. 2012/131 (C.13) The Dogs (Amendment) (2011 Act) (Commencement No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)

## 7. Written Ministerial Statements

- Publication of the Regional Development Strategy 2035 (DRD)
- De-Agentisation of Roads Service (DRD)

## 8. Consultation Documents

## 9. Departmental Publications

- Department of Finance and Personnel Memorandum on the Third Report from the Public Accounts Committee Mandate 2011-2015 - Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector (DFP)
- Continuous Improvement Arrangements in the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIAO)

## 10. Agency Publications

## 11. Westminster Publications

- Consumer Insurance (Disclosure and Representations) Act 2012
- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims (Amendment) Act 2012
- Supply and Appropriation (Anticipation and Adjustments) Act 2012

## 12. Miscellaneous Publications



# Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

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**Further Consideration Stage (FCS):** Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

**Final Stage:** Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

**Royal Assent.**

## Proceedings as at 20 March 2012

### 2011-2015 Mandate Executive Bills

| Title & Bill Number                      | First Stage | Second Stage | Comm. Stage to Conclude | Report Ordered to be Printed | CS       | FCS      | Final Stage | Royal Assent |
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| /Rates (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 2/11-15 | 16.01.12    | 24.01.12     | N/A                     | N/A                          | 31.01.12 | 06.02.12 | 07.02.12    | 28.02.12     |
| Pensions Bill NIA Bill 3/11-15           | 23.01.12    | 31.01.12     | 13.03.12                | 08.03.12                     |          |          |             |              |
| /Budget Bill NIA Bill 4/11-15            | 13.02.12    | 14.02.12     | N/A                     | N/A                          | 20.02.12 | 21.02.12 | 27.02.12    | 20.03.12     |
| Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15             | 21.02.12    | 05.03.12     | 06.07.12                |                              |          |          |             |              |
| Superannuation Bill 6/11-15              | 12.03.12    |              |                         |                              |          |          |             |              |

### 2011-2015 Mandate Non-Executive Bills

| Title & Bill Number | First Stage | Second Stage | Comm. Stage to Conclude | Report Ordered to be Printed | CS | FCS | Final Stage | Royal Assent |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----|-----|-------------|--------------|
|                     |             |              |                         |                              |    |     |             |              |

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

# Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 26 March 2012

*The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.*

## 1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

## 2. Speaker's Business

The Speaker informed Members that he had received a letter from Mr Willie Clarke resigning as a Member of the Assembly with effect from Thursday 12 April 2012. The Speaker advised that he had notified the Chief Electoral Officer, in accordance with Section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

## 3. Assembly Business

### 3.1 Motion - Committee Membership

#### **Proposed:**

That Mr Alastair Ross replace Mr Sammy Douglas as a member of the Committee for Social Development.

*Mr P Weir  
Lord Morrow*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

## 4. Executive Committee Business

### 4.1 Statement - Update on the Prison Reform Programme

The Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, made a statement regarding an Update on the Prison Reform Programme, 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.

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.*

### 4.3 Second Stage - Superannuation Bill (NIA 6/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved the Second Stage of the Superannuation Bill (NIA 6/11-15).

*Debate ensued.*

*The debate was suspended for Question Time.*

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.*

## 5. Question Time

### 5.1 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood.

### 5.2 Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots.

## 6. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

### 6.1 Second Stage - Superannuation Bill (NIA 6/11-15) (Cont'd)

*Debate resumed on the motion.*

Bill (NIA 6/11-15) passed Second Stage (Division 1).

### 6.2 Motion - Draft Rates (Deferment) (Revocation and Savings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

**Proposed:**

That the Draft Rates (Deferment) (Revocation and Savings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

*Minister of Finance and Personnel*

*Debate ensued.*

*The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

### 6.3 Motion - Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

**Proposed:**

That the Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

*Minister for Social Development*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

### 6.4 Motion - Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

**Proposed:**

That the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

*Minister for Social Development*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

## 7. Private Members' Business

### 7.1 Motion - Accident and Emergency Department at the Royal Victoria Hospital

**Proposed:**

That this Assembly recognises the unprecedented pressures currently being placed on the Accident and Emergency Department at the Royal Victoria Hospital; notes with concern that staff are working in extremely challenging circumstances and the impact that this has on staff and patients; accepts the recommendation contained in the recent review into the provision of Health and Social Care that the Department should encourage only people in need of emergency treatment to attend accident and emergency departments; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to review urgently the services at the Royal Victoria Hospital, to ensure that the necessary permanent staff are employed on an effective and efficient basis to allow the smooth operation of the Accident and Emergency Department.

*Mr J McCallister*

*Mr S Gardiner*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

## 8. Adjournment

**Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

*The Speaker*

*The Assembly adjourned at 5.47pm.*

**Mr William Hay**

**The Speaker**

26 March 2012

# Northern Ireland Assembly

26 March 2012

Divisions

Division No. 1

**Second Stage:** Superannuation Bill (NIA 6/11-15)

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 74

Noes: 12

**AYES**

*Mr Allister, Ms M Anderson, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Mr M McGuinness, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.*

**NOES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr McDevitt and Mrs McKeivitt.*

The Second Stage was agreed.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

## Papers Presented to the Assembly on 21 - 26 March 2012

### 1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

- Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2012

### 2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

### 3. Orders in Council

### 4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

- Department of Finance and Personnel Minute 20 March 2012, Under Section 8(1) of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001, Directing that Accruing Resources may be used for certain purposes for the year ending 31 March 2012 (DFP)
- The Northern Ireland Social Security Agency Social Fund Account for the year ended 31 March 2011 (NIAO)
- NIEA Regulatory Fees and Charges 2012: (DOE)
- Pollution Prevention and Control Charging Scheme
- Radioactive Substances Act Fees and Charging Scheme
- Water Order Fees and Charging Schemes
- Waste Management Charging (Northern Ireland) Scheme
- Marine Licensing Charging Scheme
- EU Emissions Trading Scheme Charging Scheme
- Abstraction and Impoundment Licensing (Fees and Charges) Scheme

### 5. Assembly Reports

### 6. Statutory Rules

- S.R. 2012/133 The Plant Health (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
- S.R. 2012/135 The Criminal Aid Certificates Rules (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2012/136 The Education (Student Loans) (Repayment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DEL)
- S.R. 2012/140 The Social Security (Suspension of Payment of Benefits and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)

#### For Information Only:

- S.R. 2012/115 (C.11) The Pensions (2008 Act) (Commencement No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/119 (C.12) The Pensions (2008 No.2 Act) (Commencement No.7) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/127 The Road Races (Croft Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/128 The Road Races (Circuit of Ireland International Rally) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/129 The College Avenue, Belfast (Stopping-Up) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
  - Invest NI: A Performance Review (NIAO)
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications



# Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 27 March 2012

*The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) 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 Trade and Business Development sectoral format

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster, made a statement regarding the North-South Ministerial Council meeting in Trade and Business sectoral format, following which she replied to questions.

### 2.2 Consideration Stage - Pensions Bill (NIA 3/11-15)

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, moved the Consideration Stage of the Pensions Bill.

Seven amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clauses

After debate, Amendment 1 to Clause 1 was **negatived** (Division 1).

As Amendment 1 was not made, Amendments 2 to 4 were not called.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.31pm.*

*The sitting resumed at 2.00pm with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.*

## 3. Question Time

### 3.1 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

### 3.2 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

### 3.3 Assembly Commission

Questions were put to, and answered by, Members of the Assembly Commission.

*The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.*

## 4. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

### 4.1 Consideration Stage - Pensions Bill (NIA 3/11-15) (Cont'd)

*Debate resumed on the motion.*

After debate, Amendment 5 to Clause 1 was **negatived** (Division 2).

The question being put, it was agreed on division that Clause 1 stand part of the Bill (Division 3).

After debate, Amendment 6 was not moved.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clauses 2 and 3 stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clauses 4 to 18 stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clauses 19 to 25 stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clauses 26 to 30 stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Clauses 31 to 34 stand part of the Bill.

Schedules

After debate, Amendment 7 was not moved.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Schedule 1 stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was agreed without division that Schedules 2 to 4 stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

The question being put, the Long Title was agreed without division.

Bill NIA 3/11-15 passed Consideration Stage and stood referred to the Speaker.

*The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.*

## 5. Private Members' Business

*The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.*

### 5.1 Review of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005

#### **Proposed:**

That this Assembly registers its concerns in relation to the quality and reliability of evidence provided by assisting offenders under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, as witnessed in the recent supergrass trial, and the subsequent undermining of confidence in the administration of justice; believes that it is essential that the criminal justice system operates in a transparent manner which respects the rights and entitlements of all citizens and engenders maximum public confidence in our policing and justice systems; and calls on the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General to use their powers to call for an immediate review of the operation of the legislation.

*Ms J McCann*

*Mr R McCartney*

*Mr S Lynch*

### 5.2 Amendment 1

#### **Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'offenders' and insert:

'in the recent trial which used evidence under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, and the subsequent undermining of confidence in the administration of justice; recognises that assisting offenders can be a powerful tool in the fight against serious and organised crime; believes that it is essential that the criminal justice system operates in a transparent manner which respects the rights and entitlements of all citizens, protects the public against criminals and engenders maximum public confidence in our policing and justice systems; and calls on the Minister of Justice to ensure that there are positive working relationships between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service in the operation of the legislation, and that adequate accountability measures are in place.'

*Mr B McCrea*

*Mr R Hussey*

*Mr R Beggs*

### 5.3 Amendment 2

#### **Proposed:**

Leave out all after '2005' and insert:

'in the Tommy English murder trial, and the subsequent undermining of confidence in the administration of justice; believes that it is essential that the criminal justice system operates in a transparent manner which respects the rights and entitlements of all citizens and engenders maximum public confidence in our policing and justice systems; and calls on the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General to use their powers to call for an immediate review of the operational

decisions taken in the aforementioned murder trial and the role of the Independent Oversight Panel in the police investigation.'

*Mr P Givan*

*Mr J Craig*

*Mr P Weir*

*Debate ensued.*

The Question being put, Amendment No. 1 **fell** (Division 4).

The Question being put, Amendment No. 2 **fell** (Division 5).

The Question being put, the Motion was **negatived** (Division 6).

## 6. Adjournment

Mr Joe Byrne spoke to his topic on Investment in sporting, cultural and tourism related projects and initiatives in West Tyrone.

**Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

*The Speaker*

*The Assembly adjourned at 8.10pm.*

**Mr William Hay**

**The Speaker**

27 March 2012

# Northern Ireland Assembly

27 March 2012

Division 1

**Consideration Stage: Pensions Bill (NIA 3/11-15) - Amendment 1**

**Proposed:**

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 7

Leave out '1953' and insert '1955'

*Mr M Durkan*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 27

Noes: 49

**AYES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McDevitt, Mr McEiduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Dallat.*

**NOES**

*Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr T Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Easton and Mr G Robinson.*

The Amendment fell.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

27 March 2012  
Division 2

**Consideration Stage: Pensions Bill (NIA 3/11-15) - Amendment 5**

**Proposed:**

Clause 1, Page 2, Line 17

At end insert -

'(8) This section shall be disregarded for the purposes of determining entitlement to Winter Fuel Payment in accordance with the Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000.'

*Mr A Maskey*

*Mr M Brady*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 34

Noes: 45

**AYES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Sheehan.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Brady and Mr F McCann.*

**NOES**

*Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T 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 B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Ms Brown and Mr Easton.*

The Amendment fell.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

27 March 2012

Division 3

**Consideration Stage: Pensions Bill (NIA 3/11-15) - Clause 1 Stand Part**

*Minister for Social Development*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 45

Noes: 30

**AYES**

*Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T 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 B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Brown and Mr Easton.*

**NOES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Murphy, Mr Ó hOisín, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Sheehan.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Brady and Mr F McCann.*

The question that clause 1 stand part was **carried**.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

27 March 2012

Division 4

## **Review of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 - Amendment 1**

### **Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'offenders' and insert:

'in the recent trial which used evidence under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, and the subsequent undermining of confidence in the administration of justice; recognises that assisting offenders can be a powerful tool in the fight against serious and organised crime; believes that it is essential that the criminal justice system operates in a transparent manner which respects the rights and entitlements of all citizens, protects the public against criminals and engenders maximum public confidence in our policing and justice systems; and calls on the Minister of Justice to ensure that there are positive working relationships between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service in the operation of the legislation, and that adequate accountability measures are in place.'

*Mr B McCrea*

*Mr R Hussey*

*Mr R Beggs*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 15

Noes: 56

### **AYES**

*Mr Allister, Mr Beggs, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Hussey and Mr B McCrea.*

### **NOES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr S Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr W Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dallat, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Sheehan, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lynch and Mr McCartney.*

The Amendment **fell**.

# Northern Ireland Assembly

27 March 2012

Division 5

## Review of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 - Amendment 2

### Proposed:

Leave out all after '2005' and insert:

'in the Tommy English murder trial, and the subsequent undermining of confidence in the administration of justice; believes that it is essential that the criminal justice system operates in a transparent manner which respects the rights and entitlements of all citizens and engenders maximum public confidence in our policing and justice systems; and calls on the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General to use their powers to call for an immediate review of the operational decisions taken in the aforementioned murder trial and the role of the Independent Oversight Panel in the police investigation.'

*Mr P Givan*

*Mr J Craig*

*Mr P Weir*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 27

Noes: 43

### AYES

*Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Miss M McIlveen, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Weir.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr S Anderson and Mr G Robinson.*

Noes

*Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Cree, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lynch and Mr McCartney.*

The Amendment **fell**.



# Northern Ireland Assembly

27 March 2012

Division 6

## **Review of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 - Motion**

### **Proposed:**

That this Assembly registers its concerns in relation to the quality and reliability of evidence provided by assisting offenders under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, as witnessed in the recent supergrass trial, and the subsequent undermining of confidence in the administration of justice; believes that it is essential that the criminal justice system operates in a transparent manner which respects the rights and entitlements of all citizens and engenders maximum public confidence in our policing and justice systems; and calls on the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General to use their powers to call for an immediate review of the operation of the legislation.

*Ms J McCann*

*Mr R McCartney*

*Mr S Lynch*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 30

Noes: 40

### **AYES**

*Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Eastwood, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr A Maskey, Mr P Maskey, Mr Murphy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Sheehan.*

*Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lynch and Mr McCartney.*

### **NOES**

*Mr Allister, Mr S Anderson, Mr Beggs, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea, Miss M McIlveen, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.*

*Tellers for the Noes: Mr Dickson and Mr G Robinson.*

The Motion was **negatived**.

**Pensions Bill**  
**Marshalled List of Amendments**  
**Consideration Stage**  
**Tuesday 27 March 2012**

*Amendments tabled up to 9.30am Thursday, 22 March 2012 and selected for debate*

*The Bill will be considered in the following order-*

*Clauses, Schedules and Long Title*

**Amendment 1**

**Clause 1**, Page 1, Line 7

Leave out '1953' and insert '1955'

*Mr Mark H Durkan*

**Amendment 2**

**Clause 1**, Page 1, Line 9

Leave out subsection (4)

*Mr Mark H Durkan*

**Amendment 3**

**Clause 1**, Page 2

Leave out lines 5 to 14 and insert -

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| '6th April 1955 to 5th May 1955        | 6th May 2020       |
| 6th May 1955 to 5th June 1955          | 6th July 2020      |
| 6th June 1955 to 5th July 1955         | 6th September 2020 |
| 6th July 1955 to 5th August 1955       | 6th November 2020  |
| 6th August 1955 to 5th September 1955  | 6th January 2021   |
| 6th September 1955 to 5th October 1955 | 6th March 2021     |
| 6th October 1955 to 5th November 1955  | 6th May 2021       |
| 6th November 1955 to 5th December 1955 | 6th July 2021      |
| 6th December 1955 to 5th January 1956  | 6th September 2021 |
| 6th January 1956 to 5th February 1956  | 6th November 2021  |
| 6th February 1956 to 5th March 1956    | 6th January 2022   |
| 6th March 1956 to 5th April 1956       | 6th March 2022'    |

*Mr Mark H Durkan*

**Amendment 4**

**Clause 1**, Page 2, Line 15

Leave out '1954' and insert '1956'

*Mr Mark H Durkan*

**Amendment 5****Clause 1**, Page 2, Line 17

At end insert -

'(8) This section shall be disregarded for the purposes of determining entitlement to Winter Fuel Payment in accordance with the Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000.'

*Mr Alex Maskey**Mr Mickey Brady***Amendment 6****New Clause**

After clause 1 insert -

**'Duty to report on the impact of health inequalities and occupation on the cost of pension provision for various occupational sectors of the population**

**1A.** The Department for Social Development shall, within one year of the date on which this Act receives Royal Assent, lay a report before the Assembly on the differences in the cost of pension provision for various occupational sectors of the population arising from health inequalities, including the impact of occupation on life expectancy.'

*Mr Mickey Brady**Mr Alex Maskey***Amendment 7****Schedule 1**, Page 23, Line 21

Leave out '2018' and insert '2020'

*Mr Mark H Durkan*

# Northern Ireland Assembly

## Papers Presented to the Assembly on 27 March 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
  - Superannuation Bill (NIA Bill 6/11-15)
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
  - S.R. 2012/138 The Code of Practice (Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities) (Appointed Day) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DEL)
  - S.R. 2012/141 The Fuel Payments Scheme (Patients Receiving Treatment for Cancer) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
  - Ensuring a Sustainable Transport Future: A New Approach to Regional Transportation (DRD)
  - 2010 Review of Fair Participation in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (DFP)
  - 2010 Review of Gender in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (DFP)
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 27 March 2012

### 2011-2015 Mandate Executive Bills

| Title & Bill Number                      | First Stage | Second Stage | Comm. Stage to Conclude | Report Ordered to be Printed | CS       | FCS      | Final Stage | Royal Assent |
|--|-------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------|----------|-------------|--------------|
| /Budget (No. 2) Bill NIA Bill 1/11-15    | 13.06.11    | 20.06.11     | N/A                     | N/A                          | 21.06.11 | 27.06.11 | 27.06.11    | 25.07.11     |
| /Rates (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 2/11-15 | 16.01.12    | 24.01.12     | N/A                     | N/A                          | 31.01.12 | 06.02.12 | 07.02.12    | 28.02.12     |
| Pensions Bill NIA Bill 3/11-15           | 23.01.12    | 31.01.12     | 13.03.12                | 08.03.12                     | 27.03.12 |          |             |              |
| /Budget Bill NIA Bill 4/11-15            | 13.02.12    | 14.02.12     | N/A                     | N/A                          | 20.02.12 | 21.02.12 | 27.02.12    | 20.03.12     |
| Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15             | 21.02.12    | 05.03.12     | 06.07.12                |                              |          |          |             |              |
| Superannuation Bill 6/11-15              | 12.03.12    | 26.03.12     | 11.05.12                |                              |          |          |             |              |

### 2011-2015 Mandate Non-Executive Bills

| Title & Bill Number | First Stage | Second Stage | Comm. Stage to Conclude | Report Ordered to be Printed | CS | FCS | Final Stage | Royal Assent |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----|-----|-------------|--------------|
|                     |             |              |                         |                              |    |     |             |              |

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage